

BULLETIN

Taking RT to the streets

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Professional recognition days, weeks and months come and go.

Posters go up on bulletin boards, posts go up on social media sites. Maybe there's cupcakes. It's a great chance to educate and celebrate the work that makes our health care and community social service systems work, but it's getting harder to break through the noise and distractions of modern life.

That's why a group of respiratory therapists decided to do something a little different for October's RT Week.

Led by Vancouver General Hospital's Lily Cheung, the group decided to get out of the clinical setting and take their message directly to the public.

"In the past we've hosted booths or spaces in the hospital to highlight the work we've achieved over the year and invited the public to take part in interactive displays that demonstrate what RTs do in an acute setting," says Cheung.

"This year we wanted to reach outside of a traditional hospital or clinical setting," says Cheung. "It's important to connect with the public when they aren't already worried about getting treatment for themselves or a loved one. Somewhere where we won't fall into our roles as patients and therapists. We wanted a more neutral space to connect."

Working with Vancouver-based event production and publicity company @thisopenspace, Cheung's team took over a vacant storefront in Vancouver's historic Gastown and created RTPopUp, a temporary gallery/information booth/meeting place where curious passers-by could hang out with RTs, tinker with equipment and receive complimentary breathing tests.

"I think the most successful aspects of the event involved the types of conversations we were able to generate between the public and the therapists," says Cheung. "Hot topics like how Canada is planning to deal with the Ebola virus, or the role of e-cigarettes in helping smokers quit conventional cigarettes, and how community care is playing an increasing role in the health system. With the public interacting with RTs representing the full scope of practice - from acute to community - it was definitely interesting to debate the different perspectives on all these issues."

Cheung says she had the support of dozens of RTs and others from around the province.

"RTs from St. Paul's, Surrey Memorial, Burnaby, Lion's Gate, Royal Columbian, Langley, Richmond, BC Children's, Royal Inland, Thompson Rivers University, GF Strong, George Pearson, Ravensong, the Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program, RT Without Borders, Vancouver General, all the way to Kenya and the Middle East were very supportive. Of course, I could not have got anywhere without the generous support from the Canadian and BC Society of Respiratory Therapists, as well as BC Association for Individualized Technology and Supports for People with Disabilities (BCITS), BC Lung Association, Asthma Society of Canada, Motion Specialties, Medigas, and Carestream. These organizations were on board all the way and contributed to the

very success of this event.

“Next year I would love to showcase the iron lung, among other neat vintage items. This event renewed my passion for the profession and I’m hoping to keep that momentum going all the way to next year!”

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