



Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health

Issue 5

Newsletter for the Mental Health Community

September 2008



Message From Stan

Dear Friends of the Chair,

The May issue of the Chair's newsletter acknowledged the departure of Ricardo, but despite losing a valued member of our team we have been fortunate that Tracy MacKenzie has stepped up to continue where he left off. The last issue also focused on the launch of a Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide, our partnership and premiere of films at the ViewFinders International Film Festival for Youth, and the development of our website – www.teenmentalhealth.org. Looking back at these and other successes helps me realize all of the great work that we as a team have been able to accomplish to date.

Two years ago this October, Sun Life Financial, IWK Health Centre and Dalhousie University and its faculty of Medicine appointed me to the Chair in Adolescent Mental Health. Since that time I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with some amazing young minds and developing many exciting local, national and international partnerships. Right now is an especially challenging time for the Chair, because after two years of developing some of our signature projects we are ready to take them to the next level!

In the first year of my role as Chair, there were many opportunities and areas in which to explore the enhancement of youth mental health. Some of our early partnerships have developed into strong collaborative relationships, while others have remained slower to develop. Over the past year one key area of focus for the Chair has been school mental health. Schools are an ideal place to address mental health promotion, introduce

targeted interventions, stigma reduction and address the linkage between mental disorder and learning. Looking ahead, developing projects to address mental health in the education system will continue to be a priority for us and may indeed become one of our signature directions.

In keeping with our focus on school mental health one of the projects we are launching nationally is *Transitions*. To our knowledge, *Transitions: Student Reality Check* is the first publication of its kind to inform first-year students about some of the major issues they may face when at college or university. It also provides suggestions on how to deal with student problems effectively. *Transitions* includes information about time management, interpersonal relationships, sexual activity, financial planning, mental illness, suicide, addictions and mental health self help, amongst other common issues. It also contains recommendations about campus counselling services and where students can go to get help or more information if they need it.

The booklet was developed by the Chair and written by Jacqueline Potvin-Boucher, with input from students, educators, health professionals, parents, and school counselors. In 2007, with funding and support from the IWK Mental Health and Addictions Program, the resource was printed and distributed in orientation packages to all first year students attending post-secondary schools in Nova Scotia. This year the project is going national. Universities and colleges in British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia have purchased *Transitions* and committed to offering it to their students and faculty.

Another opportunity for us to address mental health in schools is through our Understanding Adolescent Depression and Suicide Education Training Program. This training program is designed to enhance the knowledge of health professionals, primary care physicians and educators to enable them to better understand, recognize and assess depressed and/or suicidal youth, as well as appropriately refer them for treatment. Since April 2007, 419 professionals in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Ontario working in high schools, hospitals,

and colleges have participated in the training program. This includes 267 education professionals (e.g. guidance counsellors, youth workers, administrators, and teachers) and 152 health professionals (e.g. social workers, psychology professionals, school nurses). Our next step is to provide this training program to health and education districts across the Maritimes and offer it online it as Continuing Medical Education for family physicians and specialists.

Looking toward the rest of the year and into 2009 I will work to offer Continuing Medical Education programs to health providers, mental health literacy to educators, and expand our *Transitions* project to Jr. High schools and the workplace. Our focus on school mental health will continue as we receive input from our newly established Educator Advisory Board.

Finally, I am honoured to announce that I have received a number of awards over the past several months, including the 2008 Physician Health Promotion Award from Doctors Nova Scotia, the 2008 Canadian College of Neuropsychopharmacology Medal, the 2008 Paul D. Steinhauer Advocacy Award, and a Best Doctors in Canada award. I have also had the privilege of being elected as a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. These recognitions demonstrate the value of the work we are doing through the Chair at the local, national and international level.

If you are in Halifax on Tuesday, October 21, please join me in celebration at the second annual Chair Year in Review event from 3-5pm in the IWK Parker Reception Room (located on the main floor of the IWK, nearest the Women's Site entrance). If you would like any more information on the activities of the Chair please contact David Venn.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stan Kutcher

Contact

IWK Health Centre - Maritime Psychiatry
5850 University Avenue, P.O.Box 9700
Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada B3K 6R8
www.teenmentalhealth.org

Stan Kutcher, MD, FRCPC
(902) 470-8375 / Skutcher@dal.ca

Tracy MacKenzie - Administrative Assistant
(902) 470-6598 / Tracy.MacKenzie@iwk.nshealth.ca

David Venn - Advisor to the Chair
(902) 470-6582 / David.venn@iwk.nshealth.ca

