

Med school on Manitoulin: Northern med school students teamed with Island chiropractor in community learning program

by Lindsay Kelly

The Manitoulin Expositor — May 26, 2010

EDITOR'S NOTE: Manitoulin's range of health-care practitioners has been tapped as a valuable resource for students training to be physicians. This is the first installment of a series of articles that will examine the role of local practitioners and their contributions to this community-based model of learning.

MINDEMOYA Students with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) are broadening their insight into health care by spending time in the Mindemoya chiropractic clinic operated by Dr. Harald Simon.

During the winter months, second-year students Ayesha Butt and Jaimi Truchon each came to Manitoulin to observe Dr. Simon in his practice and learn more about the scope of chiropractic care.

"It's useful for the students to see what other health-care professionals do," Dr. Simon says. "Chiropractors, being spinal-care experts, primarily treat musculoskeletal disorders, including back pain, but it's always good to get a hands-on experience. Having medical students in my clinic helps them understand what a chiropractor does and how patients can benefit from chiropractic care."

The student visits are part of NOSM's community-based learning program that presents opportunities to learn about other health-care providers and the services they offer to patients. Students have also studied alongside pharmacists, physiotherapists, as well as sat in on diabetic clinics. It gives students a hands-on insight into what a real community clinic is all about.

Dr. Simon became involved last fall when he was approached by faculty member and Island physician Dr. Maurianne Read about his interest in hosting students eager to learn more about chiropractic. He's now had four students visit his clinic on half-day visits, where they participated in patient intake assessments and examinations.

Students, with the patient's permission, would sit in on a new-patient visit, learn the history of the patient, observe during the examination, and feel the area in which Dr. Simon detected something significant. Patients were receptive to the students being there, but the students themselves were receptive as well.

"The students I had were in their second year, and they were really enthusiastic," Dr. Simon says. "They had good questions and they weren't just there to get their sign-in sheets validated; they were pretty engaged and interested, which is refreshing."

The students were able to view how Dr. Simon might treat a condition or injury, via physical manipulation of the body, as opposed to a physician's route of prescribing anti-inflammatories or muscle relaxants.

"I find it's very stimulating personally, because it makes me have to think a little bit about what I'm doing and trying to explain technical issues to someone who has a little bit of a different perspective," Dr. Simon adds. "So it's quite stimulating for someone like me to be trying to teach what I do."

The experience was eye-opening for Ms. Butt, who was unfamiliar with chiropractic's capacity for treatment prior to her Island stay.

"I didn't know what a chiropractor's scope of practice was before meeting Dr. Simon," she says. "We were in on every patient visit. We observed and he described what he was doing."

Ms. Truchon, meanwhile, expressed interest in the methods she observed Dr. Simon employing to achieve the desired outcome.

"I guess you hear things as a layperson about what chiropractic involves," she adds. "It was very interesting to see what his approach was and how he was able to work with the joints and alleviate the patient's pain."

To Dr. Simon's knowledge, this approach to medicine is unique in the province, and NOSM is a pioneer in this aspect of community-based learning. He's hoping to take his experience hosting students at his clinic and integrate it into his work with the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College's continuing education advisory committee. The committee recently revised the continuing education requirements for practising professionals.

The new standards require chiropractors to participate in a minimum of 20 hours of structured activity and 20 hours of unstructured activity every two years as part of their continuing education. Dr. Simon would ultimately like to see the time chiropractors host med school students incorporated into that model.

"I'm trying to see what can do as far as having the activity be part of the continuing education program in other parts of the province," he says. "It's growing, but it's too early to say where it will end up. I think it's useful for people who have been in practice for a while to have medical students in their practice, and it can be a very useful continuing education activity."

The involvement of doctors of chiropractic with NOSM also assists in interprofessional collaboration, and breaks down barriers between health-care professionals, he adds, although this is less of an occurrence than it used to be.

"Currently there's much, much less of a problem with interprofessional collaboration and this kind of program is certainly going to minimize any of the remnants of the past in that regard, because it creates an understanding of what type of job a chiropractor does with medical professionals," Dr. Simon says. "My experience has been very fortunate locally, in that the medical profession has been very receptive to chiropractic and the evidence is the cross-referral that goes on locally between chiropractic and physicians."

By having students visit clinics in northern locales, it also gives them reassurance that they are not the lone medical professionals available to provide treatment. Even in more remote areas, like Manitoulin, there is a host of community resources that can be accessed to help treat patients with musculoskeletal issues, Dr. Simon notes.

"That underscores the mission of NOSM: to train medical professionals in the North to remain in the North," he adds. "It gives the graduates security in knowing that they're not going to be slogging away all by themselves in a remote community"there are other professionals to refer to and collaborate with."

This won't be the last of the students to be hosted by Dr. Simon. He has recently signed a memorandum of agreement with NOSM and says he'll welcome students to his practice in future intakes, which typically occur in the fall and the winter.

Manitoulin, with its wealth of health-care resources, is a great place for students to observe, he adds, noting that, in the end, it is the patients that will benefit from this collaboration.

"I think when health-care professionals from different disciplines work together we can deliver the most effective and efficient patient-centred care," he says. "It's a win-win situation for everybody."