

Exciting and new interdisciplinary student initiative

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The 4th Annual National Interprofessional Healthcare Student Conference, hosted by the National Healthcare Sciences Students' Association (NaHSSA) in January 2008, brought together students from across Canada who represented various healthcare professions.

The goal of the conference was to create a forum to discuss how we, as professionals, can work together more effectively to improve patient outcomes. This conference also played host to a new initiative in interprofessional student education and support—the Canadian Interprofessional Student Network (CISN). One of the executive members for the CPA Section for Students, Pamela Seeds, attended the 1st Annual Meeting of the CISN to find out the plan for this new national program. For many students, this meeting was the first time that representatives from nine health professions sat around a table and discussed their student organizations.

In attendance at the CISN meeting were students representing chiropractics, audiology & speech pathology, dietetics, physiotherapy, psychology, medicine, nursing, optometry, and respiratory therapy. Other health professions have also now been extended the invitation, including dentistry, occupational therapy, social work, naturopathic doctors, and pharmacy.

The CISN's goal is to help students from various healthcare professions share ideas and resources, work collaboratively on projects, and learn about other health care

professions (e.g., what each profession's role/scope of practice is, what the training program is like for each profession, what types of skills each profession possesses). The intent is to keep the network an informal forum through which interprofessional students can collaborate.

Currently, the CISN is in the process of accumulating an information booklet about all of the types of healthcare and applied health professions. This booklet is being created by the student organizations for each of those professions.

Currently, each student organization, including the CPA Section for Students on behalf of the profession of Psychology, is in the process of creating a 1-page document outlining the national student association, the goals/objectives of the organization, the size of the membership, the types of students in the membership, contact information, and information regarding what professional psychologists do, where we might work when our training is complete, and what our training looks like. This document should be compiled and ready for distribution by January 2009.

As well, the CISN is trying to establish other forms of knowledge transfer, including a Facebook account, website, discussion forum, and quarterly teleconferences with representatives from all the student organizations involved.

It is inspiring to know that, from a student perspective, the interprofessional

collaboration movement is gaining momentum. Many students are interested in what other professions do, and, with the help of the CISN, are trying to work together to decrease redundancy and overlap with the goal of improving patient care.

For interprofessional collaboration to work in a non-judgemental, supportive way, we believe it is essential for students from the various professions to have exposure to each

other and to learn about each other's specialized training. We need to work alongside one another to salvage our strained health system and to decrease the burden of our increasing elderly population.

Student-led initiatives such as CISN and NaHSSA are helping us do so, and will hopefully influence interdisciplinary healthcare in the future.