

April 24, 2013

MAHCP Members meet with Minister of Health Theresa Oswald.

Three MAHCP members attended a meeting with the Minister of Health today. The members are Jodi Kent, EEG Technologist, Zana Anderson, Therapeutic Recreation and Sherry Treichel, Certified Child Life Specialist.

Once again, these three ladies did an outstanding job explaining their professions, their challenges and their suggestions for improvements to the Minister. The Minister went from trying to understand the technical details of an EEG to the point of tears when listening to the passion of those who work with children and seniors.

Jodi was first on the agenda and she described the importance of having highly skilled EEG technologists who are able to interpret the slightest patterns in the test results. Jodi went on to explain that Health Sciences Centre has implemented remote access for physicians to interpret EEGs. One of the results of this has been that since physicians no longer need to be at the hospital, they are less likely to screen out less urgent patients. Predictably this has meant an increase in call backs for technologists. With plans in the works to expand remote access to St. Boniface and Children's Hospital, the expected demand on technologists is ominous indeed. Ms. Kent concluded by presenting data showing Manitoba EEG Technologists are among the lowest paid in Canada.

In her presentation, Zana explained that Therapeutic Recreation is one of the most misunderstood and undervalued professions in all of health care. While the Minister could clearly see the passion in Zana's presentation, it was also made clear that Recreation is very often seen as the department to "deal with difficult clients so other staff can get their work done." Zana further explained that Therapeutic Recreation involves individual needs assessment and requires that programs are customized to provide the highest quality of life for their clients. There is also a wide divide in terms of educational requirements in Manitoba for Recreation positions. Many sites require a Therapeutic Recreation Degree, but there is no such degree offered in Manitoba. The resulting lack of standardization of education means that many Manitoba Therapeutic Recreation Professionals do not qualify for certification and membership in their National professional body.

Sherry's presentation was the final one of the day. She explained that Child Life is a psychological service offered in Children's Hospital to meet the emotional and developmental needs of children in hospital. In fact children who participate in therapeutic play with a trained professional "exhibit less emotional distress, increased cooperation, and fewer negative physiological responses." In a continuation of the theme presented by Zana, Sherry also explained that Child Life Specialists are able to assess needs, establish goals and strategies for each child. Their play has a very real and critical purpose beyond the simple act of playing. The children don't see that, they are just playing. That's where the skill and training come into the story. Sherry also had the opportunity to explain the Music Therapy Program and the Child Life Clown Program. These programs also have significant education requirements. These professionals perform the same assessments and customizations of their programs to ensure the absolute optimum outcome for each child. Aside from being on the lowest paid Child Life

Specialists across Canada, Sherry also noted a number of other challenges. A significant concern is that there is no Child Life service offered at the Emergency Department and limited service in some other key areas. There is no degree program in Manitoba, no funding for professional development and no coverage for staff absences.

On a personal note, I would like to make a comment on these presentations. Many of our professions continue to be among the lowest, if not the lowest paid across Canada. We clearly have shortages and workload issues across the province. That is a reality that we deal with every day. Despite everything that comes along with that, when I listen to our members tell their stories, I cannot help but leave those meetings incredibly energized and proud. Our professionals continue to show that they are dedicated, imaginative and passionate about their work. We are showing government that we have value, that we are the reason that so many Manitobans get the best care that can possibly be provided. For that dedication and passion, I would like to congratulate and thank the members of MAHCP.

Bob Moroz, RTT

President, MAHCP