

## **MAHCP Members Meet With Minister of Health Theresa Oswald**

On January 9, 2013, three members of the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals met with Health Minister Theresa Oswald to discuss their professions, challenges and recommendations for change. In addition to the three members, Executive Director Lee Manning and President Bob Moroz also took part in the meeting.

**Kathy Yonda, RPN, BSCMH, ACMHW**, Community Mental Health Worker (CMHW) from Prairie Mountain Health presented the Minister with information including an increasing level of responsibility and complexity of cases combined with limited and shrinking resources. Ms. Yonda went on to describe the impact of closure of long-term bed facilities, early discharge from short term facilities along with the wage differential between Community Mental Health Workers and Public Health Nurses as being serious challenges. Depending on the region, the wait time to access a CMHW can range from 3-4 weeks to 6 months.

**Kristin Guild, M.S., CCC-SLP**, Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), also from Prairie Mountain Health described staggering caseloads and staff shortages as major barriers to providing adequate care to Manitobans. As a result of the heavy workloads, SLPs are often unable to properly assess and work with patients before they are released from hospital, leaving them without supports in the community. Additionally, the focus on immediate needs (i.e.: swallowing and eating) for patients often leaves the SLP unable to address Communication Disorders. Ms. Guild went on to explain that challenges in recruitment of SLPs include relatively low wages which are out of context with the education required to practice, as well a simple comparison to SLPs employed in the school system and private sector. Health care SLPs are the lowest paid among these three groups.

**Lynn Sylvestre, MLT**, Medical Laboratory Technologist from Diagnostic Services Manitoba, St. Boniface. Ms. Sylvestre described the value of the MLTs to the health care system as a whole. Over 80% of diagnoses in Manitoba involve an MLT. The ever increasing demand for more tests and analyses does not come with a corresponding increase in funding and staffing. The fact that there is no selection process for MLT students was presented as being a concern which has resulted in Manitoba having the lowest pass rate in all of Canada. Not only do many MLTs feel a lack of respect from other professionals in health care, but there is often an obvious disrespect shown in front of patients and families. Ms. Sylvestre also described the trend that MLTs are once again falling in the national rankings in terms of wages.

These meetings continue to be an excellent forum for our members to explain our individual circumstances to the highest levels of decision makers in our Province. We believe that Minister Oswald really attempts to understand our viewpoint and genuinely seeks the input of our members regarding how to solve some of the issues that we continue to describe. The Minister has committed to continue these meetings and we are always looking for interested members to come forward and tell their stories.

Bob Moroz, President, MAHCP.