

UBC Receives 1 Million Dollar gift from Bell for Youth Mental Health...

The gift was announced today by Mary Deacon, Chair of the Bell Let's Talk mental health initiative, at a ceremony at UBC Robson Square. Ms. Deacon was joined by Bell President and CEO George Cope, UBC Chancellor Sarah Morgan-Silvester, Faculty of Medicine Vice Dean Ross MacGillivray and Psychiatry Professor Michael Krausz.

The Bell Youth Mental Health IMPACT Project will be led by Dr. Krausz, who is also the UBC-Providence Leading Edge Endowment Fund (LEEF) Chair in Addiction Research, at the Institute of Mental Health, part of UBC's Faculty of Medicine.

As part of the project, researchers will develop a mental health web portal that provides educational and self-assessment tools, automated feedback, a list of treatment options, advice on obtaining services, and coping techniques. Additional features, such as online consultations through e-mail, chat rooms, video-conferencing, instant messaging and social media tools, will be added in the future based on research into the effectiveness of this outreach model.

"Despite the high prevalence of anxiety and depression, especially among those in late adolescence and early adulthood, the proportion of people who actually receive treatment in time is quite low," said Dr. Krausz, an expert in epidemiology and public health.

"Too often, their first opportunity to access care results from an encounter with police or a trip to the emergency room. Enabling young adults to get help early will reduce the chances that their condition will lead to substance abuse or attempts at suicide," Dr. Krausz added.

"We are very pleased to be partnering with UBC on this project which will use the latest technology to help young people suffering from mental illness have better access to care," said Ms. Deacon. "The Bell Youth Mental Health IMPACT Project fits perfectly with the Bell Let's Talk initiative and is another example of Bell partnering with leading institutions across the country, like UBC, who are looking for innovative ways to broaden the scope of work that they do to address mental health throughout our communities."

The project will include: research into how B.C.'s young adults are currently using online mental health resources and what is lacking; testing of a web-based psychotherapy program that includes an online self-assessment tool along with self-guided exercises and techniques; creation of a similar online program for anxiety; and testing the effectiveness of various online communication channels, not only between experts and patients but also between experts and primary care providers. At first, the project will focus on underserved communities and involve partnerships with primary care physicians, school counselors, police and family organizations to facilitate use of the platform by those who need it. Insights from these pilot studies will be used to develop a province-wide mental health web portal.

The project will leverage the UBC Faculty of Medicine's experience in creating a sophisticated, robust communications network for its distributed medical education program, which encompasses four academic campuses and about 20 clinical sites around the province.

"The Faculty of Medicine, through its distributed medical education network, now has ample experience using technology to address the health care needs of B.C.'s population," said Dr. Gavin Stuart, dean of the Faculty of Medicine and UBC's vice provost health. "We are grateful that Bell has given us the opportunity to apply that experience in creating a new model for providing mental health care, one that is particularly suited to the province's scattered population."