



Rx

Live it to lead it

by Katie Daniel

The biblical adage, “physician, heal thyself,” has found new meaning in today’s health care industry. Stats Canada released a study in 2007 which found that nearly half of all health care providers suffer a high degree of stress at work. Critical staff shortages, longer working hours, exponentially increasing client demand, daily life-and-death decisions – it’s a prescription for burn-out at the worst, poor service at the least.

The Calgary Health Region (CHR) is taking a highly creative and holistic approach to solutions for the stress. “One of our core values is ‘live it to lead it,’” says CHR director of wellness, Mona Pinder. And that’s exactly what they did at the CHR “Exploring Health and Healing” conference at The Banff Centre in February. “The conference helped to allow our staff to understand their own wellness first, before dealing with the community,” says Pinder.

The CHR selected The Banff Centre as their venue for a number of reasons. “The Banff Centre is an incredible facility for learning, and its location close to Calgary means it is more accessible in terms of cost for participants,” says Pinder. “The most important reason is being able to leverage the faculty at the Centre. Three of our presenters were from the Centre’s Leadership Development faculty. Leadership is an issue for us in the region, so tapping into this part of The Banff Centre’s mandate is critical.”

“We need to provide tools for our people, as well as for our system. We believe in treating the person as a whole, to keep healthy, and to heal. One of the key goals for this conference was to look at both the art and science of health and healing. Most of us have the science background. But through conferences like this, we are pushing the boundaries of how we define wellness by looking at spirituality, community, and family perspectives.”

Pinder also appreciates the Centre’s unique location. “The setting of the Centre is so beautiful. All of our conferences have been at other locations in the mountains, but this is the first time we really felt like we were ‘in’ the mountains. The campus layout really allowed us to feel like that. The design makes you get outside and walk, and the connection to nature and wellness is obvious. Sitting in the new Vistas Dining Room, I heard people gasping at the views.”

According to Pinder, about half in attendance were direct care providers. Some were business leaders, in influential positions to help get the message out. Some were not-for-profit partners. Others were regular citizens interested in promoting their own well-being.

CHR worked in various ways to create a very special environment for their participants, including creating a unique menu. “We were excited




about working with Chef and his staff to incorporate our healthy eating guidelines into the cuisine for our conference. One of our dieticians worked with the Centre on menus specifically for CHR and appropriate items were labeled with healthy guidelines logos.”

“Exploring Health & Healing” tapped into many of the programming and facility possibilities that make The Banff Centre a unique conference venue — morning water therapy in the pool; yoga and meditation in meeting rooms; Qi Gong in the gym; a Leadership Arts Ensemble performance based on the philosophy of Leonardo da Vinci in the Margaret Greenham Theatre; reel adventures from the Banff Mountain Film Festival; stories and sweetgrass with an Aboriginal elder; live music performances for each dinner service; and of course, the sessions led by faculty. Says Nick Nissley, executive director of Leadership Development, “this is the Centre at our best — truly bringing all of our best assets, in an integrated way, to a client — creating a ‘Banff Centre Experience’ that cannot be found elsewhere.”

These creative ways of approaching mind, body, and spirit were more than just stimulating, they were practical and applicable. Says Pinder, “LD faculty member Bastiaan Heemsbergen’s opening address on mindfulness was a perfect introduction to the conference. Being mindful about what you are learning, having the time think about it — really set the delegates up to have that kind of mindset throughout the conference.” Heemsbergen and Nissley’s joint session on story-telling also had meaning. “Health care is all about stories. That resonated well. there were lots of parallels for us.”

The closing plenary brought one of the most insightful moments. Facilitated by another leadership faculty member, Kevin Asbjörnson, participants were encouraged to unleash their imaginations by using the music of the piano as their voice. Says Pinder, “Doctors are not an easy sell for this type of learning. They look for black and white. But I knew we had engaged people when a family physician spoke up and said this session had allowed him to turn off his analytical brain for awhile, and truly feel. He felt that all the sessions were so profound, he needed more time to sit and ponder what he learned. It caused him to think in a different way.”

For Pinder, the lasting impacts of the conference are ripe with potential. “I can’t even begin to predict what will happen. It will take time for things to evolve. But even before I got back to my office, I had a note from a member of our organizational effectiveness team about the story-telling piece; that this was something we need to leverage in what we’re doing with our staff. We want to build further in integrating the arts into our wellness dialogue.” 

Opposite, top: No wrong notes: unleashing the imagination through music with Kevin Asbjörnson, a faculty member for Leadership Development. Bottom: Noodling around: early morning sessions in the Sally Borden pool enhance mobility.

Above, left: What would Leo ask? Expanding consciousness with the prophetic questions of Leonardo da Vinci, presented by the Leadership Arts Ensemble.

Bottom: Stretching the muscles, as well as stretching the boundaries of mind-body awareness through yoga.

All photos courtesy of Paul Rotzinger, Calgary Health Region.