



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

NLMA discusses issues facing Psychiatry

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St. John's, NL – The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association today held its fourth public information session, this time to discuss the challenges in providing psychiatric care to patients throughout the province.

The panel was led by St. John's psychiatrist Dr. Cynthia Slade and included child psychiatrist Dr. Kim St. John and rural psychiatrist Dr. Kris Luscombe.

“Poor access to timely psychiatric care and intervention is a growing concern for physicians throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Every day, psychiatrists strive to provide quality care despite external forces that are having a direct impact on our patients and their safety,” said Dr. Slade.

Dr. Slade explained that gaps in service delivery are particularly apparent in rural areas, which have been plagued by chronic shortages of community psychiatrists. In areas like the Northern Peninsula and Labrador there are no psychiatrists at all, forcing patients to travel great distances to receive treatment. Patients who require immediate intervention are particularly vulnerable.

“The evidence shows quite clearly that if you have a psychiatric diagnosis, the longer you have to wait to get adequate treatment, the worse your illness becomes and the more difficult it is to treat. Too many patients in the province have to wait at least a year just to receive a consultation. This is unacceptable and it poses a serious risk to patient safety. By the time these people reach the psychiatrist, their lives have gone through so much devastation, that it becomes much harder to help them reintegrate with their community. I find it very discouraging. I can only imagine what it is like for the patients and their families, many of whom are not comfortable about expressing their concerns because of the stigma attached to mental illness. For many, the suffering will be in silence,” Dr. Slade added.

Dr. Slade operates an out-patient practice in St. John's and provides geriatric consults at the Hoyles-Escasoni long-term care complex. She has practiced psychiatry for the past three years. Dr. St. John is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Memorial University. She is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and has practiced at the Janeway since 1989. She also operates an out-patient practice at Churchill Square in St. John's. Grand Falls-Windsor psychiatrist Dr. Kris Luscombe has practiced rural psychiatry including in-patient and out-patient care for the past six years and currently serves as Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Memorial University. All three panelists are graduates of Memorial University.

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