

**Historical milestone reached by degree graduates of Saskatchewan Polytechnic**



From left to right, Sue Myers, program head, Psychiatric Nursing and Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing programs; Amanda Rowley, graduate; Veronick Perrault Finch, graduate; Cindy Smith, associate dean, School of Nursing

Saskatchewan Polytechnic and two of its newest graduates will make history as the institution marks success of its first ever degree program, Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing (BPN) on June 19, 2015.

The BPN degree completion program was designed for working registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs). It focuses on the advanced education of psychiatric nurses in the delivery of quality mental health care and services to clients with increasingly complex needs, helping to prepare them for roles related to leadership and management, education and research. Students study on a part-time basis, taking one or two courses at a time through distance learning, with a clinical practicum.

Dr. Netha Dyck, dean of the School of Nursing, says the program's evolution was a monumental achievement approved by the Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assurance Board.

"The team effort to develop the program and ensure a smooth transition was extraordinary," says Dyck. "Rigorous work began in 2010 and the program launched in the fall of 2013."

Dyck says Saskatchewan Polytechnic's School of Nursing is a leader in reaching students where they live through various delivery modalities and technological innovations.

“Our School of Nursing continues to build its reputation for the relevance of its programming and quality of its graduates,” she adds.

"This is a momentous milestone in our transformation from a technical institute to a polytechnic," says Dr. Larry Rosia, president and CEO. "This is the first degree we are granting without a partner organization. The Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing degree is the first of many degrees from Saskatchewan Polytechnic that will provide students with an applied education to meet the needs of employers in Saskatchewan."

Both of the degree program's graduates, Veronick Perrault Finch and Amanda Rowley, were also in the first graduating class of the new diploma in psychiatric nursing in 2010.

Rowley says she chose the field to help those who often cannot help themselves. Her interests lie in the field of leadership within the profession.

“For the future, I intend to pursue a position in management or teaching new students,” says Rowley. “Both positions would satisfy my need to create a better health care system for those suffering from mental illness. The future of psychiatric nursing is wide open, so I encourage anyone considering the program to pursue their dream.

Rowley admits the completion of the degree went by fast.

“There were times when it felt overwhelming but those feelings are nothing to what it feels like to say, ‘I did it!’,” she describes.

Veronick Perrault Finch agrees with her virtual classmate.

“I feel that both the demand and the need for mental health services and resources within our health care system are growing rapidly,” says Perrault Finch. “I believe that the people who choose to be in this field have a passion to help those suffering from these illnesses. This degree is a way to increase our capacity to do so. The work and the effort that has gone in to developing this program are greatly appreciated. I truly received a valuable experience and I feel I have become a better psychiatric nurse.”

“I wanted to enhance my skills and abilities in order to help move the field of psychiatric nursing forward,” she adds. “There is such great potential within this specialty and I would love to be able to have an influence on and be a part of the change. It is very exciting!”

Sue Myers, program head, Psychiatric Nursing and Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing degree completion programs, commended the students for their hard work and reaching this goal.

“These two graduates have matured and will have many opportunities available to them as they continue to promote the profession of psychiatric nursing. For their final practicums, one of the graduates returned to Saskatchewan Polytechnic to work with the faculty in the capacity of an educator, the other graduate choose a practicum in leadership and management,” says Myers.

“Our education is unique and allows nurses to work with those with mental health challenges and developmental delays,” she adds. “It is strongly believed that nurses who are educated with mental health education are in the best position to serve clients with mental health needs.”

Robert Allen, Executive Director of the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan (RPNAS), congratulated the first graduates of the Psychiatric Nursing degree program on behalf of the Council and staff of the Association.

“The RPNAS is pleased that Saskatchewan Polytechnic has developed psychiatric nursing as the first degree program,” Allen says. “As public awareness and knowledge of mental health increases, so does the need for qualified nurses that specialize in psychiatric nursing.”

“It takes dedication and commitment to achieve a degree in psychiatric nursing through a degree completion program as it means working full time while taking classes,” he adds. “Psychiatric nursing is a demanding vocation and most practitioners enter the field having made deliberate choice to work in mental health, demonstrating a passion for excellence in ethical patient and family centered care.”

“Previous graduates of the former SIAST diploma program (prior to 2010) are also enrolled in degree completion and we wish them all success,” says Allen noting RPNAS looks forward to growth and expansion of the programs in this field.

There are four domains of practice for psychiatric nursing including: clinical, research, administration and education. Some of the courses within the degree program include: Physical Assessment, Health and Mental Health Literacy, Culture and Diversity in Health Sciences, Psychology, Addictions, and Informatics for Health Care Professionals.

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