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## Message from the OTC Director



Alba DiCenso

On behalf of the OTC Principals, I am pleased to provide this update about the work of the Ontario Training Centre in Health Services and Policy Research (OTC).

Funded by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the OTC is a consortium of six Ontario universities that offers graduate training leading to a *Diploma in Health Services and Policy Research at Lakehead, Laurentian, McMaster, Ottawa, and York Universities* or to an equivalent qualification through the *Collaborative Graduate Program in Health Services and Policy Research at the University of Toronto*.

## Our Achievements

Highlights of the past three years include:

- close collaboration of 19 Principal Investigators (Faculty) from 6 universities to make this training centre a reality;
- development of our website: [www.otc-hsr.ca](http://www.otc-hsr.ca);
- approval by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) to offer a Diploma in Health Services and Policy Research at Lakehead, Laurentian, McMaster, Ottawa, and York Universities and the incorporation of a Collaborative Program in Health Services and Policy Research at the University of Toronto;
- development of 11 new distance education graduate courses available to all OTC students at any of the 6 universities;
- establishment of the OTC Advisory Board;
- recruitment of a total of 70 graduate students from the six participating universities during the 2003 (23), 2004 (28), and 2005 (19) rounds of admission;
- development of our accountability framework;
- realization of our two Summer Institutes in June 2004 at Lakehead University on *Research and Policy Implications of Delivering Mental Health Services in Rural and Northern Parts of Ontario* and June 2005 at Laurentian University on *Health Human Resources Research and Policy (A Focus on Rural and Northern Issues)*;
- planning for the third Summer Institute in May 2006 at York University on *Women's Health Services Policy and Research*; and
- partnership with CHSRF to provide organizational and mentoring support to the Ontario component of the **EX**ecutive Training for **RE**search **AP**plication (EXTRA) program.

## Partnerships

**All of this – which has allowed us to move into a more steady phase of development – would not have been possible without the excellent partnerships that we have been able to develop with:**

- a multitude of decision-makers who have been actively involved in key tasks of the OTC that include local planning and development, Summer Institutes, Advisory Board, and policy practice;
- the Canadian Health Services and Research Foundation (CHSRF) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), that awarded us \$3.75 million from 2002 to 2012 to make this training centre a reality;
- five branches and agencies of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Mental Health and Rehabilitation Policy Unit, Health Human Resources Policy Branch, Research Unit of the Knowledge Management and Reporting Branch, Nursing Secretariat, and Ontario Women's Health Council), that have contributed to student stipends, the development of online graduate courses, and the planning, funding, and delivery of the Summer Institutes, and have also provided policy related field placement opportunities for OTC students;
- the CIHR Institute for Health Services and Policy Research, that provided financial support for our 2004 and 2005 Summer Institutes;
- Health Canada (Health Human Resources Strategies), that provided financial support for our 2005 Summer Institute;
- the OTC Advisory Board, that represents decision maker partners, university administration, OTC students, and funders;
- the 36 diverse graduate programs at our 6 universities, that provide the opportunity for their students to apply to the OTC; and
- over 150 participating faculty members across our six universities.

## Funders



Canadian Health Services Research Foundation  
Fondation canadienne de la recherche sur les services de santé



## Participating Universities



## OTC PRINCIPALS

### Lakehead University

Bruce Minore\*  
Bill Montelpare

### Laurentian University

Ellen Rukholm\*  
Raymond Pong

### McMaster University

Kevin Brazil\*  
Alba DiCenso  
Wendy Sword  
Susan Watt

### University of Ottawa

Doug Angus\*  
Barb Davies  
Nancy Edwards  
Brenda Wilson

### University of Toronto

Rhonda Cockerill\*  
Peter Coyte  
Diane Doran  
Paula Goering  
Linda O'Brien-Pallas

### York University

Pat Armstrong\*\*  
Marcia Rioux\*\*

\* Site Directors  
\*\* Site Co-Directors

Special recognition goes to **Brian Hutchison** and **Chris Woodward** (McMaster University) and **Bob Spasoff** and **Graham Nichol** (University of Ottawa) who actively participated as OTC Principals during the first two years and have now retired or transitioned to other roles.

## New and converted OTC courses

Thanks to a 2003 grant from the Research Unit of the Knowledge Management and Reporting Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the OTC was able to commission the development of eight new web-based courses and the conversion into distance education of three other existing ones. These courses – completed in March 2004 to address more directly the health services and policy research competencies that form the basis of the OTC program- are:

- Canadian Health Care System: Organization and Policy
- Knowledge Production
- Knowledge Transfer for Health Services and Policy Research
- Mixed Methods in Health Services and Policy Research
- Introduction to Qualitative Methods for Health Services and Policy Research
- Performance Measurement in Health Services Research
- Work Organization and Health
- Health Policy (Rural and Northern Health)
- Survey Methods
- Program Planning and Evaluation
- Canadian Health Policy in Comparative Perspective

Offering of these courses – which complements the close to 300 courses available across the six universities of the consortium that address OTC competencies – started in 2004.

The OTC is also delighted to look forward to the development of a new course in *Women's Health Services*, which will be commissioned later this year thanks to the generous support of the Ontario Women's Health Council.

## Student news

### CHSRF's Annual Workshop on Leveraging Knowledge

Following an invitation from CHSRF, and with OTC sponsorship, Ruby Syal (Lakehead University), Anneliese Poetz (McMaster University), Nadia Hamel and Denise Laplante (University of Ottawa), Andrea Daley and Susana Tam (University of Toronto), and Beth Dewitt (York University) attended the 2005 CHSRF annual workshop on *Leveraging Knowledge: Tools and Strategies for Action* held in Ottawa on March 3, 2005.

### York University's OTC Student Conference

Organized by OTC students at York University and with the co-sponsorship from the York Institute for Health Research and the CHSRF/CIHR Chair in Health Services and Nursing Research, the conference "*Challenging the Boundaries of Health Services Research: Making Connections*" was successfully held on April 6, 2005.

### Centre for Knowledge Transfer 2005 Spring Institute

Thanks to the kind co-sponsoring from the Centre for Knowledge Transfer, Anneliese Poetz (McMaster University) and Hina Laeeque (University of Toronto) participated in the 2005 Centre for Knowledge Transfer's Spring Institute on "*Enhancing Patient Safety through Knowledge Transfer*" during the week of May 2-6, 2005.

### OTC 2005 Meet-and-Greet

With the purpose of bringing the new OTC students together at the beginning of their program, the OTC held its annual Meet-and-Greet on September 16, 2005 in conjunction with the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Health Services and Policy Research in Montreal. The theme of the conference was *Canada's Health Priorities: Building and Maintaining Research Capacity*. Also in attendance at the conference were some students from the previous two cohorts whose posters had been accepted for presentation.

### OTC Graduates

A partial list of students who have graduated or will be graduating soon from the OTC Program includes: Beth Dewitt (York), Jennifer Ellis (McMaster), Dwayne Fournel (York), Olga Gajic-Veljanoski (Toronto), Hina Laeeque (Toronto), Christina McMillan (Laurentian), Karen Moss (Toronto), Victoria Quan (Toronto), Kristin Shields (Lakehead), Riva Soucie (York), and Ruby Syal (Lakehead).



2004 Summer Institute



2005 Summer Institute



**Pat Conrad**  
*CADRE Senior Program Officer, Canadian Health Services and Research Foundation (CHSRF).*

**Sheree Davis**  
*Executive Lead, Ministry Strategic Directions, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.*

**Alba DiCenso**  
*Director, Ontario Training Centre for Health Services and Policy Research.*

**Faith Donald**  
*OTC Student, McMaster University.*

**Fred Hall**  
*Dean, School of Graduate Studies, McMaster University.*

**Judith Horrigan**  
*OTC Student, Laurentian University.*

**Vickie Kaminski**  
*President and CEO of the Sudbury Regional Hospital.*

**Ron Pearlman (Chair)**  
*Interim Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University.*

**Rosana Pellizzari**  
*Medical Officer of Health, Perth District Health Unit, Stratford*

**Miguel A. Pérez**  
*Program Coordinator, Ontario Training Centre in Health Services and Policy Research.*

## Summer Institutes

With the themes *Research and Policy Implications of Delivering Mental Health Services in Rural and Northern Parts of Ontario* (June 2004) and *Health Human Resources Research and Policy -A Focus on Rural and Northern Issues-* (June 2005), the OTC has successfully held its first two Summer Institutes at Lakehead and Laurentian Universities respectively.

As a key instructional modality for consolidating interdisciplinary health services and policy research competencies, OTC Summer Institutes represent intensive learning experiences whereby experts in the chosen field provide students with opportunities for advanced knowledge exchange (usually facilitated through highly focused, interactive panels held every day).

Students are exposed to the policy imperatives and realities of designing and delivering health care in chronically under-serviced, rural and remote, northern environments, and are challenged to: a) develop program-specific monitoring and evaluation strategies that are scientifically rigorous and culturally appropriate; and b) design dissemination approaches that can facilitate the uptake of results by relevant decision makers.

Selection of the topic is based on the input from

Principal Investigators and key health services decision-making partners on what are considered to be crucial and current areas in health services and policy research. Planning and development of the program is directed by a Summer Institute Planning Committee that includes OTC Principals, decision-makers, and -starting with the 2006 Summer Institute- students who have attended a previous OTC Summer Institute. Central to the objectives of the OTC is the opportunity for students to learn to collaborate with decision-making partners from question formulation to dissemination of study findings. The Summer Institute provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn from decision-making partners as these partners actively participate on the planning committee, in the delivery of presentations, the hosting of students in their agencies, and the facilitation of the small groups as they prepare their Letters Of Intent (LOI).

Review of student feedback indicates that OTC Summer Institutes provide “an excellent learning experience,” “excellent speakers – diverse, knowledgeable, dynamic-,” “a great link between policy makers and researchers,” and “invaluable hands-on mentoring by experts in the field (e.g., international guests and Health Canada and Ontario Ministry of Health contacts).”

## The cornerstone of the OTC program

With 6 universities, 36 eligible graduate programs, 19 Principal Investigators, and a growing number of decision-making organizations, the strength of the OTC as an educational consortium comes from its focus on the achievement of an agreed upon set of *health services and policy research competencies* and the sharing of *common requirements* (a minimum 1.5 Full Course Equivalents beyond graduate degree requirements, that includes the Summer Institute, a Policy Practicum and/or a Research Practicum, courses as needed, and a health services thesis focus).

Once admitted into the program, students are eligible for stipends and are required to prepare an individualized learning plan that addresses: 1) Understanding of the Canadian health care system, 2) Development of the ability to carry out health services research, 3) Understanding of the theories on how the health of populations is produced, 4) Understanding of the theories of health and health services knowledge production, and 5) Understanding of knowledge exchange and the development of research partnerships.

As summarized by Principals, “The essence of the OTC is that it has a *common destination, different starting points, common vehicles, and different routes*, and operates in the context of CHSRF/CIHR (capacity-based), the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (equivalency-based), and the directions of the Curriculum Committee (competency-based).”

## EXTRA Program

In line with its overall mandate to develop capacity in health services and policy research, the OTC entered in May 2004 into a partnership with CHSRF to provide organizational and mentoring support to the Ontario component of the **EX**ecutive **T**raining for **R**esearch **A**pplication (EXTRA) program. EXTRA is a CHSRF strategic activity aimed at giving health system managers across Canada the skills to make evidence-based decisions.

The EXTRA program is supported by a group of partnering national organizations: the *Canadian Health Services Research Foundation* (CHSRF); the *Canadian College of Health Service Executives* (CCHSE); the *Canadian Nurses Association* (CNA); the *Canadian Medical Association* (CMA); and a consortium of Quebec partners represented by the *Agence d'évaluation des technologies et des modes d'intervention en santé* (AÉTMIS).

The current group of Ontario EXTRA Fellows includes a total of 15 senior health decision-makers (9 from the first cohort and 6 from the second) working on innovative intervention projects in their organizations. The Ontario Regional Mentoring Centre Program Coordinator for EXTRA is Bill Montelpare (OTC Principal at Lakehead University) with assistance from Miguel A. Perez (OTC Program Coordinator).

## Field placements in policy settings

As part of the requirements to fulfill competencies as health services and policy researchers, OTC students complete a Policy Practicum that helps them to understand the policy-making environment and gain experience and skill in working with policy makers. Working with actual projects, students have real opportunities to contribute to an aspect of the policy process by analyzing, synthesizing, and transferring information relevant to a particular policy option under consideration.

A partial list of decision-makers that have provided Policy Practicum opportunities recently includes: Bluewater Health, Canadian Blood Services, Health Canada (First Nations and Inuit Health Branch and Natural Health Products Directorate), Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Studies (ICES), Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD), Northern Shores District Health Council, and Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Assistant Deputy Minister Office, Mental Health and Rehabilitation Policy Unit, Ontario Women's Health Council).

**Policy Practicum placements provide mutual benefits to OTC students and hosting policy-making organizations as the following comments illustrate:**



*"We were very pleased with the enthusiasm and quality of Gillian's work. She did excellent work researching, analyzing, and drafting a jurisdictional review on a complex mental health policy issue within a tight timeframe. By including her in policy discussions and having her analyze various policy issues, my staff and I also gained a fuller understanding of the potential contribution and partnership opportunities between researchers and policy makers... these experiences improve organizational policy expertise and processes. They also help inform researchers regarding government's policy priorities, research needs, and opportunities for integrating the two."*

**Elsa Van Vliet**, Manager, Strategic Policy Unit, Mental Health and Rehabilitation Policy Unit, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MoHLTC), speaking of Gillian Mulvale's Policy Practicum in her unit.



*"I interacted with the strategic policy unit manager and staff, learned about the work of the unit, and attended educational sessions and numerous research presentations. I gained exposure to corporate and regional mental health managers and personnel as well as to Cabinet documents and decision-making processes...the OTC policy practicum added richness to my training well beyond the traditional classroom setting. I had the opportunity to witness the pressures upon policy-makers (my colleagues) and the competing ideas struggling to secure the policy agenda."*

**Gillian Mulvale** speaking of her Policy Practicum experience at the Mental Health and Rehabilitation Policy Unit of MoHLTC.



**2005-2007 Cohort of EXTRA Fellows**  
Banff Conference Centre, Alberta