
Roadshow showcases health care professions

*By Andrew Hudson
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It was mainly for show, but Wen-Bin was glad he brought a textbook to George M. Dawson last week.

That's because a Grade 10 student threw him a tough question:

"Once a virus is killed in a cell, how does the cell get rid of it?"

Wen-Bin is also a student, but one with extra experience—now studying to be a medical lab technologist in Prince George, he already did the same job for years back in China.

Surrounded by brightly coloured bacteria test plates and a microscope with sample slides, Wen-Bin flipped through his textbook and found an exact answer for the high school student.

It's the sort of exchange that was going on all over the GMD gym last week, when the Healthcare Travelling Roadshow stopped by.

Along with a future lab tech, this year's Roadshow included 13 college and university students from across B.C. who are bound to become doctors, nurses, midwives, occupational therapists, dental hygienists, medical radiographers, audiologists, and speech language pathologists.

Before going to GMD, the group spoke with elementary kids at Chief Matthews

in Old Massett, then headed south to meet more highschoolers at Gidgalang Kuuyas Naay in Queen Charlotte.

Now in its sixth year, the Roadshow has two big goals: first, to introduce younger students to health careers they may not have seen before; and second, to give the older healthcare students a peek at what life might be like in a smaller place like Haida Gwaii.

"One of the sayings in rural medicine is, 'If you've seen one small town, you've seen one small town,'" says Dr. Sean Maurice, a senior lab instructor with the northern medical school at UNBC.

"They're all different," he said.

"We just need to put these places on the map."

To that end, Wen-Bin and the other healthcare students stayed at the Hiellen Longhouse Village between giving demos at schools in Old Massett and Masset. Their Hiellen dinner was a gifted salmon roasted on an open fire.

Along with touring both the north- and south-end hospital, the healthcare students also got to spend time with a Haida carver, and get a peek of Skidegate Inlet.

Dr. Maurice said it can be a challenge for high school students from smaller, rural communities to enter healthcare careers—the courses are far from home and often costly.

But those who do choose healthcare

are more likely to return to work in their hometown, or a place of a similar size.

"They may decide, 'You know what, I don't really want to be taking care of my friends' parents in Masset, but actually I really like Fort Nelson,'" said Dr. Maurice.

At the UNBC medical program, for example, Dr. Maurice said about a third of graduates return to northern B.C., while the rest go on to other rural communities.

"To me that's a huge success," he said, noting the ongoing need in small towns for family doctors and many other healthcare workers.

Simran Lehal, a first-year medical student at UNBC, said that sounds like a great plan to her.

Born and raised in Williams Lake, she said she had nothing like the Roadshow to give her a hands-on sense of the many different careers in healthcare.

Fielding high school students' questions beside Wen Bin at GMD, Lehal said she enjoyed the chance to give younger students a heads-up on all the career options out there, but that's not all.

"I'm also learning what he does," she said, noting that sharing a demo station with Wen-Bin has given her a better sense of what lab techs do — and the same goes for all the other professionals on the Roadshow.

"It's very multi-disciplinary," she said.
