

New UM fellowship gives boost to sleep medicine in Manitoba



The University of Manitoba and Misericordia Health Centre will jointly announce a new UM fellowship that will make it possible for more Manitoba patients to be assessed and treated for sleep disorders at the provincial Sleep Disorder Centre.

UM is one of only six Canadian universities to receive this new accreditation.

The Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada-approved fellowship will help to attract and retain sleep physicians in Manitoba, according to sleep specialist Dr. Nancy Porhownik, assistant professor of internal medicine and co-section head of respirology in the Max Rady College of Medicine, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences.

Adding the UM-based fellow to the team at the Sleep Disorder Centre is helping to reduce wait times for Manitobans who need a sleep study and follow-up care.

Interviews/Photo Opportunities

What: Announcement of new UM Fellowship in sleep medicine – a Manitoba first

When: **TOMORROW:** Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 10 a.m.

Where: Sleep Disorder Centre, 3rd floor Wolseley East building, Misericordia Health Centre

- Who:**
- Dr. Nancy Porhownik, *co-section head of respirology, University of Manitoba*
 - The Honourable Uzoma Asagwara, *Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care*
 - Dr. Sarah Jane Sass, *fellow*
 - Charles Adler, *Sleep Disorder Centre patient*

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New UM fellowship gives boost to sleep medicine in Manitoba

April 9, 2024 – A new fellowship is making it possible for more Manitoba patients to be assessed and treated for sleep disorders, the University of Manitoba and Misericordia Health Centre jointly announced on April 9.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada recently accredited the section of respirology at UM – part of the department of internal medicine in the Max Rady College of Medicine – to start training one fellow per year to be certified in the sub-specialty of sleep medicine.

“Being able to offer this fellowship in what we call an ‘area of focused competence’ in sleep medicine increases the number of physicians at the provincial Sleep Disorder Centre at Misericordia Health Centre from seven to eight,” said Dr. Nancy Porhownik, a sleep specialist who is assistant professor of internal medicine and co-section head of respirology.

“The fellowship is a game-changer that will help us to attract and retain sleep physicians in Manitoba. Academic sleep medicine specialists don’t just provide care to patients. They also teach and conduct research, so this new fellowship is a boon to sleep medicine in the province.”

“Today’s announcement is a first for Manitoba,” said Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care Minister Uzoma Asagwara. **“Manitoba is now home to one of only six universities in Canada that offers a fellowship that will support the education, assessment, diagnosis and management of disorders related to sleep, breathing and movement. This fellowship is key to our government’s goal of making it easier for Manitobans to access the health care they need, closer to home.”**

Adding the UM-based fellow to the team at the Sleep Disorder Centre is helping to reduce wait times for Manitobans who need a sleep study and follow-up care.

A sleep study, sometimes done in a lab at Misericordia and sometimes by the patient at home, is a diagnostic test that captures data such as brain waves, blood oxygen levels, breathing patterns and leg movements while the patient sleeps.

The UM fellow will gain expertise in assessing, diagnosing and managing sleep disorders such as insomnia, narcolepsy, circadian rhythm (body clock) disorders, breathing disorders like sleep apnea and movement disorders like restless legs syndrome.

Before the Royal College approved the new training program at the six universities, certification in sleep medicine was not available in Canada. Porhownik had to challenge her sleep medicine exams in the United States.

To be eligible for the sleep medicine fellowship at UM, applicants must first complete a four-year medical degree, then a medical residency and specialty training.

Dr. Sarah Jane Sass, the first fellow to be accepted, started her fellowship about three months ago. She became fascinated with sleep medicine, she said, during her rotations through the Sleep Disorder Centre during her two-year specialization in respirology.

“Poor sleep affects every facet of a patient’s life and is linked to many other health problems, such as heart disease,” Sass said. **“There’s a great need for specialists in this field.”**

“It’s a joy studying sleep medicine in such a supportive and collaborative environment, and I look forward to what the future brings.”

Sass, who is from Ontario, plans to continue practising sleep medicine in Winnipeg after she completes her fellowship.

Sleep physician specialists at the provincial Sleep Disorder Centre review more than 2,600 day and overnight sleep studies and more than 2,200 home sleep studies annually. Together, they are helping Manitobans sleep better, assessing and treating more than 10,000 patients annually.

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