

Ministry of Health invests in mental health

By Krista Baliko **Posted:** January 10, 2017 6:00 a.m.



(l to r) Clinical psychology students Michael Edmonds and Joelle Soucy working with Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos in the Online Therapy Unit at the U of R. Photo courtesy of U of R Photography

Few people have not been directly or indirectly touched by anxiety and depression. And though treatable, many people remain untreated or under-treated for reasons that include limited access to care because of rural and remote locations, long wait times due to a shortage of providers, time and mobility constrictions and/or concerns about privacy.

However, researchers at the University of Regina are working to help those affected by these disabling conditions.

Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos and her team in the Online Therapy Unit at the University of Regina deliver web-based therapy sessions to Saskatchewan residents.

“Internet-delivered cognitive behaviour therapy (ICBT) is convenient and, importantly, effective in reducing the unnecessary suffering caused by anxiety and depression,” says Hadjistavropoulos.

During the eight week program, clients work through online materials that provide strategies for dealing with their conditions. They also have weekly contact with a therapist by phone or email.

While not meant to replace face-to-face counseling, Hadjistavropoulos says ICBT is another tool for patients trying to improve their mental health.

“Our clients report significant improvements in symptoms and functioning after participating in our program. Some people’s symptoms are alleviated altogether and many people who get better stay better,” says Hadjistavropoulos.

Use of the service has been steadily growing and the team is currently screening over 800 residents annually and treating more than 600.

The Ministry of Health recently provided Hadjistavropoulos with \$356,000 in funding.