



Dr. Michael Jong, vice-president of medical services for the Labrador-Grenfell health district, says the new technology provides an "extra layer" of care for Nain, N.L., residents.

Robotic system pioneered in N.S. helps remote clinic

By **JOHN MCPHEE**
Health Reporter

Dr. Robot is now making emergency house calls up north.

The same remote presence robotic system used in Nova Scotia since 2007 has been officially launched in the Inuit community of Nain, N.L.

The system, the first of its kind in northern Canada, was put in place six months ago, said Halifax neurosurgeon Ivar Mendez, who attended the launch Thursday.

"The reaction in the community has been spectacular," he said in an interview from Nain after the launch.

More people are seeking care because the robotic system allows many to be treated at the Nain Community Health Clinic instead of having to be flown 1½ hours to hospital in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The health-care centre in Nain, which has a population of about 1,030 people, is staffed by nurses. Now doctors in Happy Valley-Goose Bay can use the robot to lead resuscitation, dis-

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DR. MICHAEL JONG
Labrador-Grenfell health dist.

cuss treatment plans and interact with patients and the local health team.

Medical data such as ultrasound images also can be transmitted.

This technology was pioneered in Canada by Mendez and other doctors at the Brain Repair Centre, operated by Dalhousie University's medical school, the Capital district health authority and the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. There are three robots in Halifax and one in Sydney.

For that reason, Health Canada contacted the centre a year ago to help establish a fifth

system in northern Canada.

The \$250,000 system will be piloted in Nain for another six months. At that point, Health Canada will decide whether the system will be kept there permanently.

"This robotic technology offers the people of Nain the comfort of an extra layer of medical care and support on a 24-7 basis," Dr. Michael Jong, vice-president of medical services for the Labrador-Grenfell health district, said in a news release.

"It's especially valuable when there's an emergency and when ice, snow and other treacherous weather conditions do not allow for safe passage to Happy Valley-Goose Bay."

There are about 200 communities in Canada where people must fly to get medical treatment, Mendez said. He would like to see remote systems established across the North.

"It's an issue of access. Life-and-death situations happen because they have no doctors."

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