



Mike Bannister has been a Hacking Health organizer and mentor in St. John's, N.L. for about four years.

GOOD FOR WHAT AILS US

Opportunity abounds for Atlantic med-tech entrepreneurs

"I'm not trying to scare you away with all of this," says Brett Vokey, standing in front of about 20 young people at Memorial University's medical school last November.

Vokey, a 23-year-old engineer, owns BreatheSuite, a company making devices to help patients better use their inhalers. He was explaining how he navigated a labyrinth of tests, certification and insurance to turn his idea into a prototype. The gathering was organized by the medical school in partnership with Hacking Health St. John's, a local outpost of an international organization looking for revolutionary health care solutions.

Not only do N.S. and N.L. have the highest numbers of physicians per capita in the country, a considerable percentage of their population is without a family doctor (one in five in Newfoundland and Labrador, according to the province's Medical Association). More numbers show N.L.'s doctors are unhappy and itching to leave. Thirty-six per cent are dissatisfied with their work-life balance and 14 per cent are planning a move to another province, according to the Canadian Medical Association.

Those figures show big opportunities for innovation, says Mike Bannister, the newly-appointed director of health innovation and partnerships at the province's centre for health information. He's also been a Hacking Health organizer and mentor for approximately four years.

Pointing out that N.L. spends nearly 40 per cent of its budget on health care, Bannister says the solution isn't more money. Instead, through Hacking Health's regular meetups and hack-a-thons, he brings together students, would-be entrepreneurs and health care professionals in hopes of bringing the innovation-driven entrepreneurial sector on board to tackle towering health care problems.

The rewards for entrepreneurs can be huge, Bannister says. A health care system leading the country in problems could lead the country in solutions, so the market potential is enormous, he says.

And there are other perks. As Vokey wrapped up his presentation that November evening, he leaned into the mic and grinned, telling the group that med tech has a leg up on regular tech. In med tech, he said, you get to help people. You get to change their lives.



36%

N.L. physicians
dissatisfied with
their work-life
balance



14%

N.L. physicians
planning to
leave the province

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