

The University of New Brunswick Indigenous Nursing Program

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The UNB Aboriginal Nursing Initiative 2008-2016

Aboriginal peoples across Canada have diverse and proud histories that include rich cultural and spiritual traditions. However, many of these traditions were altered or even taken away upon the arrival of European settlers. The forced introduction of Eurocentric culture and values on Aboriginal societies began a cycle of social, physical, mental and spiritual destruction. This has led to the appalling current state of Aboriginal health today. The effects of this colonization and other governmental policies, like those found in residential schooling and the Indian Act, have eroded the traditional way of life for many Aboriginal people. Colonization has led to intergenerational trauma on subsequent generations of residential school survivors. This erosion has had a cumulative negative impact on the health and well-being of individuals, their families and communities. For example, lower life expectancy, epidemic numbers of chronic disease, poor mental health, lack of basic human necessities such as clean water and food security, and economically disadvantaged communities lead to the current poignant situation in a large number of Aboriginal communities.

There are urgent changes required within the country's healthcare system to address the complex needs of Indigenous health. Archaic policies and frameworks along with embedded racism exist in healthcare systems across the country, limiting the ability Aboriginal peoples to access culturally safe healthcare.

There are, however, interim strategies that are in place to attend to the long-term goal of improving the quality of life for Indigenous peoples. In creating a culturally safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous nursing students alike, the UNB Faculty of Nursing aims to foster culturally safe nursing practices that meet the healthcare needs of this particular population.

In response to an accreditation review by Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) in 2008, the Faculty of Nursing (FON) at University of New Brunswick (UNB) reviewed the enrollment and retention trends among Aboriginal students over a 27-year period between 1990 and 2007. The environmental, cultural and personal circumstances that impacted these trends were also examined. It is estimated that only nine Aboriginal nursing students graduated from UNB FON during this period. In response to this analysis, the Aboriginal Nursing Initiative (ANI) began in 2008, supported by funding from Health Canada's Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative (AHHRI). With the inception of the ANI, a database was established to monitor the number of students admitted to the program who self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry. Between 2009 and 2013, 21 students graduated from the program. Many factors contribute to this increase in enrollment and retention, supported by the ANI, whose overarching mandate is to respond to and address the recruitment, retention, curriculum, faculty development and policy issues related to the provision of culturally competent and safe nursing education within the Faculty of Nursing at UNB. In its submission to the AHHRI Program, the Faculty of Nursing intended to achieve the following objectives:

- To increase recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students in the baccalaureate nursing program in all three UNB sites: Fredericton, Bathurst and Moncton
- To strengthen and expand personal and academic support to Aboriginal nursing students in all three UNB sites: Fredericton, Bathurst and Moncton
- To support and mentor Nursing Faculty teaching Aboriginal students, and to facilitate and foster a culturally competent and safe learning environment for both students and faculty
- To support and foster Aboriginal students' knowledge and pride in their cultural heritage and to share this knowledge with the broader populous
- To develop and implement an Integrated Cooperative Learning Option for third-year Aboriginal nursing students in a local First Nation community
- To develop a targeted Aboriginal Nursing Student Orientation Program on campus for first-year students
- To serve as an effective and viable resource to the Faculty of Nursing and the university community at large.

Indigenous Nursing Program 2017 and Onward...

In the last ten years, there have been significant improvements in the program itself and, moreover, successes with the students it is intended to serve. There has been a considerable increase in the number of Aboriginal graduates in the BN program, an increase in the retention of Aboriginal students who may have otherwise withdrawn from the university, as well as a stronger presence of cultural awareness and respect within the entire faculty

and student body. The significance of partnerships with local First Nations communities has been recognized as an inspiring and beneficial model for all UNB faculties and lends to the quality and success of the community nursing experience for Aboriginal students.

One of the most significant changes to the Indigenous Nursing Program (INP) is its survival and retention through the dedication and support from the Faculty of Nursing. Leadership from within the faculty have identified the necessity of the program, and throughout the evolution of the INP have pledged their support through a variety of means to ensure that the objectives of the program continue to be realized. Since the termination of the AHHRI funding, UNB has committed to the continued existence of the program through the provision of funding to support the mandate, and to extend the boundaries of the program to include enhanced objectives and outreach to the broader university populous.

Ten years into its mandate and under new direction, the Indigenous Nursing Program continues to provide the much needed individualized and collective student support to Indigenous nursing students. As an offer of true collaboration and partnerships, the INP also connects with non-Indigenous students, faculty and staff to foster an understanding of Indigenous cultures, languages and ways of knowing, being and doing. This broader reach of understanding between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous allies leads to a culturally safe environment for all and engages people in collaborations towards respectful and supportive co-existence.

The INP engages in more specific activities to increase uptake and acceptance of Indigenous culture, particularly with nursing students who are learning about community health programming. The INP offers a full-day cultural education day at the beginning of the term in Sitansisk, which allows for the entire third-year class to engage in the rich experiential learning of Wabanaki peoples, through historical teachings, storytelling, talking circles, crafts, tasting of traditional food, singing and dancing, and attending powwow. The INP Director collaborates with the clinical groups assigned to local First Nations communities to support their experiential learning opportunities. For example, the students coordinate community-based initiatives that are driven by the community health team and based on the needs of the particular community to which they are assigned. In this way, the students are learning about the true process of primary healthcare, and how to engage with high-risk populations with complex health challenges. By meeting the needs of the community, they are building significant relationships with the Wabanaki peoples, and subsequently improving their health outcomes.

Engaging student nurses with Indigenous cultures and communities can happen in a variety of formats. One example of experiential learning that proved to be a source of introspection and deeper understanding was the student volunteer work with the UNB Red Shawl Campaign. The NURS 3165 course clinical group assigned to Sitansisk were dedicated volunteers throughout the four-day awareness campaign to highlight Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. During the week, the students learned about this Canadian phenomenon through engagement with families of the victims, acting as honour guard for the Red Shawls on display at the Alumni Memorial Building, preparing for and participating in the Red Shawl Healing Walk in downtown

Fredericton, attending the guest speaking engagements dedicated to the cause, and through reflecting on this experience in recognition of their own personal privilege in life. Their reflections solidify their understanding of the intergenerational effects of the Indian residential school system on Indigenous peoples in Canada, and the realization that this fundamental understanding and recognition leads to quality and culturally safe healthcare delivery within their nursing careers. Besides, this experience better prepares the nursing student to act as advocate and ally within the healthcare system.

The Faculty and Staff of Nursing at UNB are dedicated to supporting the INP through their participation in cultural events and teaching opportunities. The INP Director facilitates cultural learning opportunities for all to enhance their understanding and uptake of the ways of Wabanaki peoples. Cultural education during curriculum sharing days, serving of traditional foods during cultural events, facilitation of sweat lodge ceremonies, the KAIROS blanket exercise, drop-in sessions, provision of literature and cultural items for teaching purposes, sharing of current Indigenous news and events, are some examples of initiatives led by the INP.

In collaboration with the UNB Mi'kmaq Wolastoquey Center, the Indigenous Nursing Program Director has facilitated the recognition and the uptake of the 'National Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action' through participation as co-chair of the UNB TRC Working Group Task Force. This diverse group of allied UNB faculty and staff are committed to ensuring that UNB addresses the 'Calls to Action' through discussion and consensus recommendations that will eventually formulate the UNB TRC Action Plan, unveiled in spring of 2018. The Faculty of Nursing encourages the INP to broaden partnerships with other faculties and

programs at UNB in recognition of the importance of moving this mandate forward.

Moving forward, the Indigenous Nursing Program will continue to passionately support Indigenous nursing students towards success in the program and beyond. Through building Indigenous human resources available to work with Indigenous communities, the UNB Faculty of Nursing aims to foster a culturally safe space for Indigenous peoples to access quality, timely and culturally secure healthcare. Moreover, through embedding Indigenous content throughout the program via a mandatory Indigenous course as part of the curriculum, the Faculty is recognizing the value and significance of cultural understanding as part of a comprehensive nursing program.

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