

Miyopimatisiwin “A Good Path”
Blue Quills First Nations College
Health Sciences Program

Presentation NAHO National Conference

November 26, 2009

Blue Quills First Nations College

- BQFNC was the first post secondary institution under the complete control of First Nations communities.
- Established as a Residential School, it was taken over through peaceful protest and negotiations with the federal government in the early 70's.
- BQFNC is situated on reserve lands near Saddle Lake Cree Nation and is controlled by a board comprised of seven First Nations communities in northeastern Alberta.
- Currently offering vocational, college, and university courses in a number of different disciplines (Social Work, Arts, Trades, Sciences, Education and Language)

BQFNC Health Science Program

- There is a definite and growing need for health services and health professionals both in general and specifically with respect to Aboriginal communities.
- Where services are available they are often provided by professionals with little or no experience or cultural competency with respect to Aboriginal populations. (e.g. 7 of 9 physicians that work with the local (St. Paul) hospital and associated health centre are from either South Africa or India).
- Untapped potential within the Aboriginal population. Over 50% of the population is under the age of 24.

BQFNC Health Sciences Program

- A number of initiatives have been, and continue to be, utilized to attempt to address the HHR shortages both in rural settings as well as specifically in Aboriginal communities.
- Many of these are either attempts at coercing urban and non-Aboriginal health professionals to relocate in order to provide services to rural and Aboriginal populations or; at providing training and professional development toward creating culturally safe and competent care.
- The creation of a cadre of Aboriginal health professionals is also a significant area of focus but the current demand far outstrips supply.

BQFNC Health Sciences Program

- The current focus of many Aboriginal health professional programs and initiatives have in many cases been as a deficit model to fill gaps in both programs and students. (i.e. creation of quotas, separate ‘seats’ in programs, academic upgrading and/or preparatory programs, etc.)
- While the need for these programs is clear, the focus on filling gaps prevents looking at building for the future.
- The vision of the BQFNC Health Sciences Program is to assist students to become whole, healthy individuals that can then go on to aid our communities in the improvement of health services and amelioration of health.

BQFNC Health Sciences Program

- Ideally, this would create a number of individuals with the mental, physical, spiritual, and social skills and abilities to continue their path towards improving the health of our communities.
- Whether this is through continued studies in the health professions or through continued exploration of traditional health and healing practices is a choice of the student. The goal is for students to make this decision from a position of personal health and strength.

BQFNC Health Sciences Program

The work to date has focused upon:

- gathering the opinions and guidance of Elders, Healers and community members with respect to what are the key components, goals and outcomes of a 'health sciences program' from an Indigenous perspective;
- research on existing programs that are targeted at Aboriginal students;
- curriculum development;
- External outreach (public, Aboriginal communities, students, etc.) as well as partnerships (IPAC, NAHO, AHRNetS, etc.)

BQFNC Health Sciences Program

Interim findings and developments:

- Elders, Healers and community member interviews and talking circles have resulted in a number of direct recommendations with respect to program philosophy, content and vision.
- Curriculum recommendations include: Indigenous languages, traditional protocols and ceremonies, healthy lifestyle and personal development support, alternative healing modalities, Indigenous philosophy and perspectives on healing.
- External partnerships have been established with a number of organizations (IPAC, NAHO, AHHRI, AHRNetS, etc.)