

Building the Capacity of Inuit in the Health Field by the Ajunnginiq Centre

INTRODUCTION

It is important that Inuit become their own health care providers. Presently, most health care staff must be hired from the south, which can result in a lack of understanding between providers and patients, as well as high turnover, lack of trust, and other issues arising from differences in language and culture. Inuit need the opportunities and knowledge to enable them to take their place in the health care system.

Arctic high school and post-secondary school enrolment and completion statistics were collected. The experiences and opinions of high school students, post-secondary students and graduates, those who had left a post-secondary program, and educational system personnel were gathered through questionnaires. These respondents identified gaps, barriers, and problems related to educational success. They also made recommendations for high schools and post-secondary schools, and provided options about education generally and promotion of health careers specifically.

Not enough Inuit are going to post-secondary programs; even fewer are entering health-related programs; and too many are dropping out.

ENROLMENT AND COMPLETION

Inuit graduates for some post-secondary schools over a three-year period are displayed below. It is evident that southern post-secondary schools are producing a higher percentage of graduates in health-related programs but the numbers are still low.

Inuit Post-Secondary Graduate Results Post-Secondary School Informants June 2001-2003				
	Graduates	In 2001	In 2002	In 2003
Northern Colleges	Total Number	354	303	322
	From a Health Related Program	6%*	8%*	2%*
Southern Post-Secondary	Total Number	37	33	30
	From a Health Related Program	24%	6%	17%

* Nunavut Arctic College health program figures may include graduates of a teacher education program.

Information for this table was collected from the major regional funding sources. Not all funding sources were contacted.

Enrolment At Post-Secondary Schools Funding Sources Informants Fall 2003								
Region	Total	Other			Health		Who left their program by Dec. 2003	
		College	University	Programs	Male	Female		
Labrador	180	63%	37%	0	34%	66%	14%	12%
Nunavik	31	68%	32%	0	26%	74%	16%	16%
Nunavut	438	81%	14%	5%	29%	71%	11%	—
Inuvialuit	91	—	—	—	—	—	31%*	2%
Total/ Average %:	740	75%	22%	3%	30%	70%	14%	9%

“—” = not available at the time of interview

* “Other Programs” = upgrading programs or the programs were not mentioned by the funder

* Inuvialuit health-related enrolment figure may have included teacher education students

Two to three more women than men are enrolled in programs. It is necessary to learn why men are being left behind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information presented in this poster is taken from the discussion paper titled *What Sculpture is the Soapstone, Education is to the Soul: Building the Capacity of Inuit in the Health Field*. Visit www.naho.ca/inuit

This discussion paper would not have been possible without the participation and input of the 27 Arctic high school principals, Inuit high school students across the Arctic, Inuit post-secondary students, northern and southern post-secondary schools, funding organizations for the Inuit regions, and people with an interest in Inuit education including teachers, school staff and local organizational representatives. Thank you to all who gave your time and energy to this project.

READINESS FOR POST-SECONDARY

Questionnaire responses from all post-secondary school students, staff, and other non-student informants indicated that a lack of academic readiness for post-secondary education was the major concern.

Because advanced level courses—especially in English, math and science—are necessary for admission to and success in health programs, 27 secondary schools were surveyed to find out their academic course offerings. The table below shows an overview of advanced-level courses offered in the 2003-2004 school year.

Overview of Arctic High School Course Offerings in Final High School Year 2003-2004			
Course Type	Percentage of Schools	Course Type	Percentage of Schools
Advanced English	89%	Environmental Studies	44%
Academic Math	74%	Physics	26%
Advanced Math	63%	Calculus	4%
Biology	56%	Academic Science	
Chemistry	48%		

It is evident that northern students have limited access to the advanced level courses necessary for post-secondary health programs. Schools noted that availability of these courses usually depends on the number of students interested and on the presence of qualified teachers. However, all regions make an effort to provide courses through online study or distance education, as well as some night classes, when students request them.

Ways must be found to make these courses available. Possible options to consider (in addition to further development of effective distance and online study) are:

- summer school (for example, by bringing in qualified teachers from outside the community) and
- video conferencing, which is already used in some communities for telehealth. (It has also been used in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik in north/south music education and cultural exchange.)

DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

Lack of motivation and personal problems were cited by both secondary and post-secondary school students as the main reasons why students drop out of high school.

Post-secondary school students said the lack of motivation and support were the most important issue for high school dropouts, with personal issues also a significant factor. More than a third also viewed academic issues as a reason.

There were some interesting differences in the responses from male and female secondary students: more than half the girls stated personal issues as the most important reason; only a third of the boys noted personal issues, ranking this as the second most important reason after motivation. A significantly greater percentage of boys, 29 per cent of boys versus 19 per cent of girls, also stated that work considered “too hard” was a factor in dropping out.

PROMOTING HEALTH CAREERS

Respondents were asked how health careers could be promoted among Inuit both generally and among students. The need for adequate information and understanding about health careers at the elementary and secondary school level was mentioned most often. Suggestions for such promotion activities included:

- providing a variety of presentations or visits in or after school by health professionals;
- incorporating health careers information at an earlier age in the curriculum;
- providing experience opportunities for students (e.g. career or science fairs, and/or a career experience week);
- promoting local graduates and role models;
- providing up-to-date health curriculum, materials, and courses; and
- providing good relevant information: i.e. job descriptions.

CONCLUSION

Increasing numbers of Inuit students are accessing and completing post-secondary education, both in the north and the south. Despite personal issues, family responsibilities, and academic challenges, students repeatedly demonstrate that they are committed to goals, capable of overcoming obstacles, and willing to set positive examples.

High schools must better prepare students for advanced study. Students need cognitive/study/personal skills, course content, and expectations that meet the standards and prerequisites necessary for post-secondary school success generally and health careers specifically.

High school courses appropriate to advanced health careers must be offered. Further development of options like online and/or distance education, video conferencing, and summer school may be considered as alternatives to provide access to necessary courses, with adequate support.

Effective strategies for helping students maintain motivation, attendance, and personal wellness are needed including adequate support, counselling, and guidance services. Schools, families, and communities all play a role in providing this support and establishing an environment that encourages and enables individuals to continue their education.

Strategies for developing awareness of the wide variety of health careers are needed.

More Inuit students are attending northern colleges than southern post-secondary schools. However, few health care programs are offered in northern colleges. Northern colleges must therefore find ways to provide a wider variety of health-related programs in the Inuit regions.

Students must therefore be provided the solid foundation of skills and knowledge that will enable them to succeed in any health program in any location. Inuit should be enabled to access all options and areas of interest.

If needs are identified and addressed, Inuit will be better able to acquire the tools they need to become their own health providers in every area of health care. Each individual who is successful becomes an example and an inspiration to the following generation.

