

19th Global Nursing Education Conference

April 27-28, 2017 Las Vegas, USA

Challenges in nursing education in Canada's Arctic: Educator and student perspectives

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Nursing education in Canada's remote north is complex, offering a variety of challenges both to educators and students. Located in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Nunavut Arctic College offers a foundation-level pre-nursing program and in partnership with Dalhousie University, a Bachelor of Science in (Arctic) Nursing program. Numerous variables contribute to challenges in educating the next generation of Arctic nurses, including: Cultural/historical issues and their effects on indigenous student learning, issues with access due to remoteness of location and a lack of appropriate mentors. The depth and breadth of these challenges in this remote location are to date, not well understood. The aim of this project is to overcome context challenges in delivering nursing education in a remote location. Our objective is for students and faculty to identify and devise solutions to these challenges through the collaborative effort among student cohorts. To this end, faculty identified an innovative strategy to enable collaboration and combat the issues associated with small class sizes. This strategy is a project whereby students from the pre-nursing program work with second year nursing students, thereby increasing student-to-student networking capacity and idea sharing between cohorts. This approach offers the added benefit of developing student-to-student mentorships which will cater to the cultural needs of the diverse student body. Registered Nurses and faculty within the program typically share a non-indigenous cultural identity which is not reflective of the cultural heterogeneity of the student body. The project will allow students to explore and reflect upon their own challenges and experiences, thereby helping faculty to further identify challenges in delivering nursing education in a remote context. As a part of this project, students also have to suggest possible solutions to the challenges discussed. Faculty will conduct a similar assessment and reflection, enabling challenges to be viewed through both student and educator lenses.

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