Department of Health and Social Services’ Response to Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated’s Report on Recruitment and Retention of Inuit Nurses in Nunavut

May 2010
Introduction


It is a wide-ranging report which provides a detailed analysis of the barriers and challenges impacting the recruitment and retention of Inuit nurses and recommends measures to reduce these barriers and increase the number of Inuit in nursing.

The Government of Nunavut’s (GN) Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy (Strategy), is a five-year action plan released in the fall of 2007, and was implemented after June 2008 following the ratification of the Nunavut Employees Union Collective Agreement. The Strategy addresses the long-term health care needs of Nunavummiut by focusing on the recruitment of indeterminate nursing staff, the preparation of Inuit for nursing careers, and the retention of Nunavut’s nursing workforce.

The number of Inuit in nursing remains low at approximately 4 to 5% of Nunavut’s indeterminate nursing workforce. Through the Strategy, the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) has been taking concrete actions to change this by promoting nursing as a career, improving nursing education and development, and improving mentoring of new graduates.

Increasing access to education and employment for Inuit in health careers is essential for a strong and sustainable health system in Nunavut, as well as for the health and well-being of Nunavummiut and an increased number of Inuit employees in the territory. As stated in Tamapta: “Our goal is to have more graduates and to reduce the gap between unemployed people and job opportunities.” HSS is making a significant investment in developing Inuit in health and social services professions to make this a reality.

Accordingly, HSS welcomes NTI’s report, which elevates the profile of recruiting and retaining Inuit nurses in Nunavut.

Although released in 2010, NTI’s report is largely based on work undertaken up to the winter of 2009. At that time Inuit nurses and nursing students, nursing instructors, HSS staff and Inuit organizations provided their views on the barriers and challenges for Inuit nurses in Nunavut. Recommendations set out in the report are based on these views, as well as research material, and NTI’s perspective on these issues.

Federally funded through the Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative this report was developed by NTI with input from Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative Steering Committee comprised of representatives from Nunavut Arctic College (NAC), HSS, Health Canada and NTI.
However, the Committee members were not given the opportunity to actively engage in the review of the findings nor the development of the recommendations. Consequently, there are a number of concerns with respect to the report.

First, the report does not fully acknowledge HSS’ work in recruiting, educating and hiring Inuit nurses in Nunavut. The report was released 12 months after the information was collected and does not capture the work carried out by HSS between fall 2008 and winter 2009, and beyond.

Second, the report contains some factual errors. For example, the report states that the GN, HSS and NAC do not have funding to address recruitment of Inuit into nursing. This is incorrect as a budget supported all of the work which was underway or under development at the time of the report, as well as in the following year.

Third, there are several recommendations which HSS cannot support. For example, the report states that Inuit nurses should be given priority choice on shift selections and rotations. While nursing can be a demanding job, especially for those with family responsibilities, it would be inequitable to give priority choice on shift selections and rotations to one group over another, and would not respect the collective bargaining agreement.

It is important to note that, while the report does have these shortcomings, NTI makes some valuable observations, and several of the report’s recommendations are consistent with past departmental recommendations and policies, as well as reflect current priorities.

The Department of Health and Social Services’ response sets out the work done by HSS to date, as well as the future work that is envisioned under the Strategy.

**NTI REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

Among its observations and recommendations, the report calls for “profound systemic and attitudinal change”, along with consensus among all stakeholder for the establishment of a representative, professional Inuit nursing workforce that is able to provide effective, accessible and appropriate health care services to achieve and improve the health, prosperity and self-reliance of Nunavummiut.

The report makes seven major recommendations in the following four categories:
A. Inuit Nursing Recruitment Promotion (Recommendation 7)
   - Promote nursing as a career choice for Inuit

B. Education of Inuit nurses (Recommendations 1, 4 and 5)
   - Introduce measures to prepare students for success in nursing programs
   - Increase the level of support available to Inuit students in the nursing program
   - Adapt the nursing program to better reflect Inuit culture and values

C. Inuit employment in nursing (Recommendation 2)
   - Identify and eliminate systemic barriers to Inuit employment

D. Support, mentorship and professional development (Recommendations 3 and 6)
   - Develop a culture of mentorship
   - Introduce measures to support Inuit Nurses

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES’ RESPONSE TO REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Inuit Nursing Recruitment Promotion

The report calls for a plan for an on-going strategy to: educate Inuit students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 about nursing as a potential career; celebrate and honour Inuit nursing students and nurses through posters, brochures, ads, career fairs, etc; dedicate funding to promote nursing as a career; and evaluate the promotional campaign.

Under the Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy, significant progress has been made toward an “Inuit in Nursing” campaign. Several new activities have been undertaken to increase awareness and interest of nursing as a potential career for Inuit and several more are planned for the coming year. Many of these activities were modelled on the successful recruitment practices of NAC’s Nunavut Teacher Education Program.

Since the implementation of the Strategy in June 2008, activities have included:
• Two series of television Public Service Announcements, one profiling Inuit nurses and another profiling Inuit nursing students in Nunavut, airing on CBC-North and APTN

• An Inuit in Nursing poster series recognizing individual achievements of each of three Inuit nurses being developed and distributed to all communities

• Photo galleries of Inuit nurses developed and displayed in key public areas of health services buildings and offices.

• New “Nunavut Nurse” print and radio advertisements promoting nursing education options

• New “Nunavut Nurse” brochure and booth banners targeted to Inuit youth and young adults

• New Nunavut Nurses website with integration of elements that promote nursing as a career for Inuit

• YouTube posting of Inuit Nurses in Nunavut video

• Inuit nurses speaking at youth-targeted events, including in high schools and youth conferences

• Participation by HSS staff and NAC staff, including a nursing student and instructors, at Nunavut career fairs, school events, and classroom presentations

These new investments began in the fall of 2008, and have been well-received by Inuit youth and young adults. These efforts cost approximately $100,000 per year and are continuously being improved. While it is too early for an evaluation of HSS efforts to date in this area, these activities will be assessed as part of the evaluation of the entire Strategy planned for the end of the fourth year (2011).

B. Education of Inuit nurses

Among its recommendations, the report calls for increasing grade school and high school students’ exposure to health careers; improving skills in math and science in high school; expanding and evaluating the Foundation Program; increasing resources such as lab equipment; and designing a
nursing assistant program while encouraging other health care workers to upgrade their skills to enrol in the nursing program.

The report recommends culturally appropriate learning strategies, the use of Inuit instructors where possible, and the integration of Inuit resource materials and Inuit culture into the nursing program.

The report also calls for increased student tutoring support; quality student housing; affordable, quality child care, setting aside spaces for nursing students; review of the current financial student assistance to ensure it meets level of need; support for the creation of social networks for students; and workshops on life-skills integrated into the curricula.

Since the fall of 2008, HSS and NAC have actively been working on the issues raised in these recommendations. Below is a description of some of the activities to date.

**School-based Health Career Counseling and Health Career Youth Summer Camps**

In the winter of 2010, HSS, in collaboration with the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation and with funding support from Health Canada, held a training workshop "Health Careers in the Classroom" to teach GN health and education staff counselling techniques to promote nursing and other health careers.

In the works for summer 2010, HSS plans to bring Health Science and Health Careers Youth Camps to Nunavut. The development plan for the camps was made possible through federal funding. The camps are run by Actua, a charitable, science, engineering and technology youth outreach organization that has unique experience delivering programs in Nunavut and in Canada that stimulate youth to consider science based careers.

The camp objectives are to: inspire and encourage Inuit youth to pursue health careers; build confidence in Inuit youth so they continue in school and qualify for post-secondary education in health career fields; and involve Inuit community representatives to share their traditional knowledge and help Inuit youth make the connections between what is learned at camp and what is significant to their local culture and heritage. The camps are targeted to run in three communities in summer 2010.

Both Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regional science societies also offer annual, regional science camps that rotate from community to community each year.
Increasing skills in math and science

There is still more to be done in improving math and science skills as these are critical for success in any science based education program. There continues to be a need to encourage Nunavut youth to stay in school and take math and science courses through to high school graduation.

The Department of Education is in the process of increasing opportunities to learn math and science skills by:

- Hiring of a new Science Coordinator. As part of his/her duties, the new coordinator will focus on the development of the science curriculum for Grades 9 and 10.
- Reviewing the secondary school graduation requirements for mathematics. One of the changes being discussed is to increase the mathematics graduation requirement from 10 to 15 credits. In Grade 11, students will also be able to take an additional science course, providing opportunities for students to specialize in math and science programs.
- Developing an environmental studies science 10-11-12 program. This program will incorporate numerous opportunities for students to learn biology within authentic contexts, and will include a pure sciences preparation course with a concentration on physics, chemistry, and an introduction into biology, and mathematics. This will allow students to move from the environmental program into the pure sciences.
- Implementing multiple graduation options in 2011-12 which will include an option related to community care-giving and family studies. It is the intention that students taking this option would consider a variety of career paths, particularly in the field of health care and human services.

Teachers and consultants in both the Kitikmeot and the Kivalliq regions have developed science societies. The Kivalliq society has recently been awarded a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council funding grant.

Orientation of Potential and New Nursing Students

NAC does schedule interviews with all potential nursing student applicants to ensure that, among other things, they have a realistic understanding of the Nursing Program’s demands. It is hoped that, over time, a recruitment package will be made available for nursing students that includes a detailed and realistic description of the academic and social demands of student life.

NAC Student Services welcomes and delivers workshops to all students before classes start. NAC is hoping to develop a CD with a virtual tour of
the campus for all learning centres. It would show potential students the facilities (e.g. campus, the residences, the classrooms and library) as well as the services NAC offers.

**NAC’s Foundation Program and Expansion of the Nursing Program**

As part of the Strategy, in 2008 and 2009, there was an expansion of the Foundation Program in Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet. As a result, in 2008/09, 12 additional students registered in those two communities, with four graduating, and in September 2009, 16 additional students were enrolled. Currently, these programs are offered in seven communities; however it is hoped that over time, these programs can be offered in even more Nunavut communities. With respect to evaluation of the Program, NAC is currently reviewing the possibility of offering a more specialized Nursing Access Year, in addition to the Foundation Program.

It was also decided to expand the nursing degree program to Cambridge Bay in 2009 and to Rankin Inlet in 2010. While measures were initiated to set up the program in Cambridge Bay, the expansion was postponed due to an inadequate number of qualified applications. Subsequently, NAC and HSS are evaluating the possibility of offering a two-year Practical Nurse Program in both of those communities instead of the full BScN program, targeting an intake date of September 2011.

**Increased Resources for the Nursing Program**

Additional support in the form of English tutoring and support for national nursing examinations was provided to students beginning in 2009. Students benefited from this additional support, and NAC instructors observed an improvement in English writing skills and noted that this support was very important to the students’ success in writing the national exam. Upon further assessment, it was also decided in 2009/10 to provide a new Inuit counselor to better support nursing students.

Funding was also provided by HSS to NAC for hands-on learning material to enhance the delivery of the program, including a patient simulator and lab equipment for the delivery of the science courses, and for a travel budget for the Program Coordinator to promote the program across the Territory.

While it is too early to assess HSS efforts on students’ learning, as well as their retention in the program, these activities will be assessed as part of the evaluation of the entire Strategy planned for the end of the fourth year (2011).
Access to Quality Housing and Child Care

NTI’s report recommends that students have readily available, quality housing. Since 2009, there has been increased quality housing units available to nursing students at NAC Student Services.

With respect to access to affordable, quality childcare, since 2009, NAC’s Student Services has allocated more spaces for nursing students in existing and new child care centres at NAC.

Social Networking and Life Skills for Nursing Students

NTI’s report recommends supporting the creation of social networks for students who may be without family and/or friends while attending school in Iqaluit. NAC supports networking through Student Services, in a variety of ways, including through recreational activities. However, NAC hopes to increase networking opportunities over time.

NAC also organizes a three-day Student Orientation to support the development of life-skills. In addition, the NAC librarian is available to teach students how to use the library and do research in our library.

Inuit culture into the nursing program.

Nunavut Arctic College is already working, and continually striving, to adapt the nursing curriculum to integrate Inuit culture and values. It will continue that process during its review of the nursing curriculum with its university partner, Dalhousie University starting May 2010.

Financial Aid to Nursing Students

With respect to financial aid, there is assistance for Inuit students through Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students (FANS) program. However, to supplement the FANS program, HSS and NAC are collaborating to develop a needs based bursary system to replace the current system of bursaries based on grades, coupled with a Return of Service component. Implementation of this system is targeted for September 2010.

Health Service Careers Training Ladders Project

A Health Service Careers Training Ladders project began in January 2009 and was completed in March 2010, in collaboration with NAC. The project has redesigned current health and social services related education programs so that they are more modular with “step out and step back in” options. The project also ensured that there is increased horizontal and vertical transferability of course credits. In this way, Inuit are encouraged to
upgrade their skills and have increased access up the “training ladder.” As part of that work, a new option was explored where students would be able to take a two-year Practical Nurse Program and, with the completion of two additional years in the nursing program, would be able to obtain their RN and BScN. Delivery of the Practical Nurse Program is targeted to start in September 2011.

Results to Date

In addition to base funding for the Nursing program, additional investments under the Strategy for Foundation Studies and enhancements to the Nursing Education Program totalled $448,000 in 2008/09 and $600,000 in 2009/10.

Program statistics indicate that the intake of students for the Nursing Education Program has been increasing from 1999 to 2009 for a total of 23 nursing student graduates; however, the graduation rate remains at approximately five students per year from the four-year B.Sc.N. (Arctic Nursing) Program (See Appendix I).

The total of ten new beneficiary nurses from the inception of the Program is a significant achievement for a young territory with a relatively small population base (See Appendix II). Currently, there are ten beneficiaries working as indeterminate or casual nurses in Nunavut, some of which obtained their nursing education outside of the territory.

It is too early to assess the longer term impact of the Strategy on the education of Inuit nursing students, and additional work and activities still need to be rolled out.

C. Inuit employment in nursing

Among its key recommendations, the report calls for addressing obstacles to: hiring Inuit nurses at Qikiqtani General Hospital (QGH); the setting of targets to hire Inuit nurses compatible with factors such as availability; the analysis of salaries and benefits of health care workers relating to resident versus agency nurses; giving Inuit nurses priority choice on shift selections and rotations; and implementing a staffing plan to monitor progress and make adjustments to the strategy.

Hiring of new nurses at QGH

Upon graduation, all of this year’s class of nursing students were offered full-time positions at the QGH. Four of the five have accepted these offers. HSS is working with the remaining graduate to place her in another type of nursing position in Iqaluit.
Nursing Staff Schedules

According to the Collective Agreement, staff schedules are posted two to three weeks in advance.

Setting targets for Inuit nurses

It is not clear that setting targets for Inuit nurses in Nunavut would be helpful as hiring rates are directly related to graduation rates. Also, best efforts are already being made to attract, develop and hire Inuit nurses. There is a small population pool in Nunavut and there are not enough qualified Inuit nurses across the North in general.

Compensation for Nunavut Resident Nurses and Agency Nurses

The reality is that the territory still needs to be able to attract agency nurses due to a shortage of nurses in the labour market and the health issues facing the territory. The report gives the impression that Inuit nurses in particular feel that they are not treated as well as agency nurses, when in fact this is a sentiment shared by all staff nurses across Canada with respect to agency – not just Inuit nurses.

With respect to compensation, prior to the last Collective Agreement, the salary and bonus structure of nurses was analyzed from various perspectives, including comparison to agency nurses.

In NTI’s report, the section on GN nurses’ bonuses and allowances downplays the competitiveness of the GN package. The GN is very competitive in comparison to other jurisdictions, as shown by the hiring results in the 2009 Interim Evaluation of the Strategy. From June 2008 to October 2009, there was a net gain of 31 nurses (50 hires and 19 losses) - with new nurse hires stating that the chief motivating factor for pursuing a career in nursing in Nunavut was the new salary scale together with the signing bonus. This net gain of 31 nursing staff exceeded the provisional targets set by HSS for the Strategy.

Since the Strategy’s inception, there has also been a steady decrease in the usage of agency nurses as the number of indeterminate and casual nurses has increased.

Priority for shifts and communities among nurses

The report states that Inuit nurses should be given priority choice on shift selections and rotations. While nursing can be a demanding job, especially for those with family responsibilities, it would be inequitable to give priority
choice on shift selections and rotations to one group over another, and would not respect the Collective Agreement.

**Evaluation of the Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy**

In the fall of 2009, the 2009 Interim Evaluation of the five-year Strategy was provided to Members of the Legislative Assembly. It is anticipated that another evaluation will be undertaken at the end of Year 4 of the Strategy (2011).

**D. Mentoring and Professional Development**

Among its recommendations, the report calls for mentoring for nursing students and new nurses; support for Inuit nurses during the first year of being “on-call”; the development of mentor program materials; and the implementation of a mentorship program, assessing costs, impact and making changes as required. The report calls for the establishment and scheduling of professional development, and an annual assessment of learning and development needs of nurses.

**Mentoring and Professional Development at Qikiqtani General Hospital**

Since January 2010, work has been underway to implement a mentorship and professional development program at Qikiqtani General Hospital. This work is a joint initiative with participation from Nunavut Employees Union, Health Canada, Nunavut Arctic College, the Canadian Federation of Nurse Unions, The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) and HSS; $730,000 (monetary and in-kind contributions) has been allocated for this work, which includes a $400,000 contribution from Health Canada.

With respect to the mentoring program, experienced nurses currently working at QGH have been invited to participate in the program. Nurses who have been selected to act as a mentor will be provided with on-site mentor skills training through a workshop. The mentor skills program includes training in the following areas:

- Mentor roles and qualities
- Stages of the mentoring relationship and corresponding tools
- Cultural safety
- Graduate nurse transition
- Intergenerational differences
- Learning relationships and learning plans
- Personal styles
- Coaching
- Communication
- Giving/receiving feedback
• Supporting critical thinking

New graduate nurses from NAC will be provided with a mentorship program orientation upon hire. They will be mentored one-on-one by an experienced nurse mentor throughout their six month orientation.

A mentorship culture will be fostered at QGH through the provision of training for nurses in mentorship communication, working with different generations, teamwork, stress management and change management.

Through these educational opportunities and the chance for new graduates to dialogue with a mentor, it is hoped that the mentoring skill sets of experienced nurses from the QGH will be further enhanced and the transition for new grads to nursing practice will be smooth.

With respect to professional development opportunities, the following training is being provided through this same initiative to nurses at QGH:

**Enhanced Critical Care Training** - The Critical Care Education Network (CRI) has a strong track record of providing Critical Care training to nurses, physicians and other health care providers. CRI will be providing enhanced critical care training to QGH nurses. This training will be in a “train the trainer” format, allowing QGH nurses the opportunity to themselves teach critical care skills in the future. CRI will also provide continuing education modules to nurses at QGH in order to maintain their skills and knowledge in Critical Care.

The Ottawa Hospital - The Ottawa Hospital has allowed the use of their Clinical Nurse Educators to provide education at QGH on-site and via video-conferencing. The education provided in this manner is based on clinical education and professional development needs as identified by staff nurses and includes workshops covering palliative care, wound care, mental health, communication, change management, working with different generations, team building and stress management. This clinical education is being recorded to serve as a digital learning resource which will be made available to nurses throughout the territory.

**Work Study Program**: A limited number of nurses at QGH will have the opportunity to participate in a work study program at The Ottawa Hospital. The purpose of this initiative is to support QGH nurses in their professional commitment to lifelong learning and excellence by providing them an opportunity to expand their skills (clinical, leadership, mentoring, etc.), network, and share ideas through exposure at The Ottawa Hospital.
All work in the area of mentoring and professional development will be evaluated to ensure that there is continuous improvement. Over time, should there be additional funding support, it would be desirable to expand these opportunities to nurses in other regions and to nursing students. The same can be said for undertaking an annual learning and development needs assessment, although the Professional Development Initiative (PDI), described below, offers an opportunity for nurses to do a self-assessment and access PDI funds to meet their individual needs.

**Professional Development Initiative**

A new Professional Development Initiative for front-line nurses across the territory was established in 2008. From June 2008 to October 2009, 58 nurses utilized the PDI, with a total of approximately $200,000 being applied from Strategy funds. Some of the events attended by nurses under PDI include: conferences and courses on mental health, palliative care, pregnancy and addictions, paediatric care, diabetes and emergency care.

**On-Call for New Graduate Nurses**

With respect to new nursing graduates having a transition period before being on-call, every new graduate hired at a community health centre in the past three years has been mentored and has had a transition period before being on-call.

**CONCLUSIONS**

One of the central goals of the Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy is to enable an increasing number of Inuit to participate in this health care profession in Nunavut.

The number of nursing student graduates from NAC’s Nursing Education Program has increased over the past ten years for a total of 23, with about five students graduating each year. Of these graduates, there are ten who are Nunavut beneficiaries. Additionally, ten beneficiaries work as indeterminate or casual nurses in Nunavut, which is a significant achievement.

It is too early to assess the longer term impact of the Strategy in the hiring of new Inuit nurses by HSS, and additional work and activities still need to be undertaken.

New recruitment promotion activities aimed at Inuit have begun and show promise. A lengthier campaign aimed at recruiting Inuit into nursing and other health fields should result in increasingly positive results. However,
there is a limit to this initiative’s effectiveness because many Inuit who do apply are not academically qualified for the program. Although an increasingly expanded and successful Foundation Program is in place to prepare Inuit for entry, efforts to strengthen academic skills must reach back into the elementary and high school system.

A new tripartite “Inuit in Nursing” Working Group was formed in January 2010 to promote discussion and collaboration between NAC, NTI and HSS in order to make progress on increasing the number of Inuit nurses in Nunavut.

Nunavut is heading in the right direction even though there is still much work to be done. HSS is committed to continuing to address the challenges in nursing facing the territory, and working with partners and stakeholders such as NTI, to create the conditions that enable Nunavummiut to become nurses and other health care workers.

HSS values its relationship with NTI and will continue to build on that relationship to meet common goals in Inuit health care, seeking opportunities to promote increased participation of Inuit nurses in our workforce.

Together, we can ensure a bright and healthy future for Nunavut and Nunavummiut.
## Appendix I

### Nursing Education Program Enrolment

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## Appendix II

### Inuit Nurse Graduates and Hires

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of NAC Graduates</th>
<th>Registered Nurses / GN Employee</th>
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<td>2 of the graduates become RNs and 1 is employed as a RN in NU</td>
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<td>1 of the graduates becomes an RN and is employed as RN in NU</td>
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<td>4 of the graduates become RNs and 1 is employed as a RN in NU</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5 graduates, of which 1 is Nunavut beneficiary</td>
<td>4 of the graduates become RNs and 3 are employed as RNs in NU</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>5 graduates, of which 1 is Nunavut beneficiary</td>
<td>5 of the graduates become RNs and 2 are employed as RNs in NU</td>
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