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making
it work

The Canadian Case Study Report



Executive Summary

In partnership with the Government of Nunavut's Department of Health, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), and Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine led the Canadian element of the "Recruit and Retain – Making it Work" project, funded by the European Union Northern and Arctic Periphery Programme.

As implied by its title, the Nunavut Physician Recruitment and Retention Project was focused on stabilizing the physician workforce in Canada's arctic territory of Nunavut, where 38,000 residents, of whom 85% are Inuit, live in 25 air-access only communities, and where challenges with access to health services are considerable. Beyond limited access, the transience of health service providers in the region caused concern related to continuity, quality and cultural relevance of care.

A steering committee was established, with membership delegated by the Deputy Minister of Health of the Territory, and by the President of NTI, as well as key personnel at NOSM and the Executive Director of the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre.

Together, the steering committee developed key baseline information, and determined priorities and key activities that could be supported by this project.

Key initiatives that were undertaken over the course of this project include:

- Analysis of the existing Physician Recruitment Website.
- Launch of a cultural orientation App that is shared with all new physician recruits before their arrival.
- Two Continuing Education and Professional Development Conferences for Physicians featuring topics and speakers highly relevant to Northern and remote medical practice.
- A Health Careers Camp for youth from across Nunavut.
- An environmental scan of physician contract models in similar jurisdictions in Canada and abroad.

Since the beginning of this project, new initiatives that have emerged include:

- A new pediatrics residency position in Nunavut.
- Launch of a new physician recruitment website for Nunavut.
- Launch of new, more flexible contract models.

This report provides details related to the initiatives implemented in this project, as well as key recommendations for on-going work to establish a stable, sustainable physician workforce in Nunavut, including

1. **Conditions for success**

- Consider developing a periodic cycle of population service needs assessments, including data on health indicators, adequacy of services, and patient surveys
- To ensure on-going leadership commitment to recruitment and retention, develop an explicit recruitment and retention strategy and periodically present indicators of impact on quality and continuity of care of this strategy
- Create an annual cycle of activities of recruitment and retention activities to ensure that work is focused not only on “fighting fires” created by vacancies, but on retention initiatives as well.
- Build a clear budget for recruitment and retention into 5-year projections
- Advocate for funding to over-recruit beyond clinical need, to ensure physicians have protected time for community engagement, teaching and collegial professional development.

2. **Recommended on-going activities**

- Periodic re-assessment of service model and profile of target recruits
- Recruitment website refresh every five years and engagement of “as and when” communications firm to support on-going updates and announcements to be posted to the Nunavut Physician Recruitment web site.
- Continue to provide current version of the cultural orientation app to all new physicians
- Annual Continuing Education and Professional Development event for physicians
- Annual cultural activity days for physicians, similar to Government of Nunavut employee entitlements (“IQ days”)
- Involvement of physicians in recruitment decisions
- Continue to support youth health careers promotion
- Continue to support innovative models of health professional education, medical student and resident placements
- Advocacy for additional resources to support protected time for resident and medical student training and academic career development for Nunavut physicians.

The Nunavut Physician Recruitment and Retention Project – Case Study Report

Background of the Canadian Project

In Nunavut, one of Canada's Arctic territories, the challenges of recruiting and retaining a professional workforce are similar to those faced by other Northern, rural and remote regions.

At one time, territorial administrators struggled to have enough physicians available to meet service needs, and contract negotiations were based on a critical lack of services. In 2016, by contrast, there were typically 14-15 full time physicians living in Nunavut, complemented by a large roster (of over 220 physicians) who come and go to provide the required 31 full time equivalent (FTE) physicians needed to meet estimated service needs.

However, between April 1, 2014 and October 31, 2016, (31 months) 229 different physicians signed on for a total of 788 individual contracts in Nunavut. This reflects a significant discontinuity of care, which is known to be associated with significant increased medical error, and other health care quality challenges that result in poorer patient outcomes.

This suggested that the challenge in health services for Nunavut is no longer a critical shortage of personnel. Administrators can turn their attention to issues of quality, particularly continuity of care.

The Department of Health in Nunavut has a progressive and socially accountable vision for Nunavut Health Services, as highlighted by the following statement in 2016 by Dr. Sandy Macdonald, then Territorial Chief of Staff:

“The ultimate recruitment and retention goal for Health is to develop a representative work force enabling Nunavummiut to obtain health services from Nunavummiut in Inuktitut from providers who are grounded in Inuit culture.”

This suggests the importance of promoting health careers within Nunavut and among Nunavut youth, while also ensuring that the current providers are grounded in Inuit culture, and providing a level of continuity of care that ensures that Nunavummiut consistently receive quality care.

A survey of Nunavut physicians in 2016 indicated that current contract models were “all or nothing”: physicians were either supported to move to Nunavut and make the territory their home, or they were offered only a short-term locum contract. Some physicians indicated that while they were not able to relocate full time to Nunavut, they would consider making a long-term, part-time commitment to Nunavut (NU), however, there was no contract model available that allowed them to do this.

With a number of physicians willing to make Nunavut a significant part of their practice, without relocating full time to NU, there seemed to be an opportunity to take physician contracts in a new direction that will have a positive impact on continuity of care. Together, our project partners looked at the baseline data available, and undertook a variety of analyses to inform decisions about key priorities and projects that could be implemented with the resources available through this project to advance physician recruitment and retention.

Project Partners

Our partners in this project, who delegated members to our steering committee included:

- The Government of Nunavut's Department of Health
- Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (Nunavut's Indigenous organization)
 - Note – Makigiaqta, the Nunavut Inuit Training (NTI) Corporation, has been created during this project and have delegated members to the steering committee, instead of NTI
- Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre
- Northern Ontario School of Medicine

Project Priorities

The project steering committee identified the following priorities to best serve the needs of Nunavummiut:

1. An ultimate goal of Inuit/Northern physicians serving Inuit
2. In the absence of above, a pool of committed physicians who call Nunavut their home or are committed to providing service in Nunavut as a significant element of their career
3. To fill shorter term vacancies and locums, a smaller pool of part-time physicians is needed, who are knowledgeable about Nunavut and offer culturally safe care.

Project Initiatives

Based on these priorities, the baseline information collected, and the available resources through the [Recruit and Retain – Making it Work Project](#), the Nunavut Physician Recruitment and Retention project Steering Committee identified the following priority initiatives.

Upstream investment in tomorrow's health professionals

- Career promotion among youth
 - With participants in Nunavut Sivuniksavut (a program in Ottawa for Inuit high school graduates from Nunavut who are considering post secondary education).

Key activities undertaken in this area

Our team reached out to Nunavut Sivuniksavut and we were not able to create an experience for Nunavut Sivuniksavut students. However, an opportunity arose to work with the Government of Nunavut's Department of Health and Nunavut Arctic College to host a [health careers promotion camp](#) during a school break in February 2018 for 20 high school students from around Nunavut.

This exciting initiative, largely funded through an additional contribution from the Government of Canada, also leveraged the resources and partnerships established through the NU physician recruitment and retention project. Due to the success of this initiative, further federal funds have been secured to repeat this pilot a second time, and to secure on-going resources and permanent leadership for this initiative.



Improved Recruitment of Physicians

- Refreshing the NU physician recruitment website
- A pilot of new physician contract models
- A cultural orientation app for mobile devices¹

Key activities undertaken in this area

Website Refresh: The Government of Nunavut had already identified resources and needed changes to their web site, and our team offered to undertake additional analysis and provide support to the updates to their recruitment web site. Key contributions:

- Our baseline data collection included surveys of physicians who had practiced in Nunavut, and included questions around “what information would it have been valuable to have prior to coming to Nunavut.”
- Our team reviewed the existing web site and its content, and made recommendations about the web site’s format and content based on our baseline data.
- The web site has been completely refreshed and additional changes are planned for the new year.



Cultural Orientation App for Mobile Devices: The Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, independent of this project, created a cultural orientation app for health care providers in Nunavut. This app has been made available through the recruitment web site and evaluated, with input from Nunavut physicians. This app addresses one of the

¹ A project led by Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, implemented in tandem with this project

gaps that was identified by physicians in baseline data collection. The app is now consistently shared with every physician when they receive their service contract. Dr. Gwen Healey, Qaujigiartiit's Executive and Scientific Director indicated that the considerable uptake of this app by the health professional community in Nunavut is due in large part to the collaborations developed through this project.

Pilot of New Physician Contract Models: From the baseline data collected, and conversations with Nunavut physicians, it became apparent that there was considerable dissatisfaction with the contract models that were available for physicians to choose from, as well as how shifts were scheduled. There was a general sense that retention and continuity of care could be improved if these were changed.

- Key informant interviews were undertaken with health services administrators in other rural and remote jurisdictions in Canada and internationally. A contract models environmental scan was developed. This was intended as a platform for discussion among administrators and physicians, so that new contract models could be created, cost modelling could be completed, new contract models could be piloted, and impacts on recruitment and retention measured.
- Around the time of completion of the environmental scan, the Chief of Staff in Nunavut retired. Our project team met with the Deputy Minister of Health and other key administrators, who preferred to defer discussions with physicians about their contract models until a new Chief of Staff was on board. A new chief of staff has been subsequently hired, and has embraced many of the principles identified in our report. Medical Affairs is implementing wholesale changes to the contract models for physicians in the territory. He indicated that he also plans to make changes to scheduling processes to support improved continuity of care and has identified this as a priority.

Enhanced Retention / Team Building among NU Physicians

A positive and collegial work environment and access to relevant professional education are factors known to support retention of professionals in rural and remote environments. In order to advance the NU physician work environment in these areas, our steering committee identified Continuing Education and Professional Development (CEPD) events for physicians as a priority initiative.



In June of 2017 and again in June of 2018, pilot CEPD events were held which prioritized Northern and rural practice issues, peer to peer learning, and guest speakers with considerable experience in rural and Northern practice.

Each year, between 15 and 20 physicians, medical residents and some allied health professionals participated in the training, which included topics such as: a panel discussion in innovative service models delivered by key leaders from other rural/remote jurisdictions in Canada; specialized topics in pediatrics, delivered by Nunavut-based pediatricians; simulation-based training in emergency management and managing emergencies from a distance; best practices in supporting smoking cessation; trauma-informed practice; and, physician self-care. Each year, physicians were invited to evaluate the events, and without exception, indicated they found the sessions valuable and would like to participate in them annually. Each event also included sessions related to Inuit culture and the history of health services in Nunavut, providing context to the health services environment. The sessions were also eligible for continuing education credits through Canada's Physician and Specialist Colleges.

For each event, the Department of Health invested in the travel and back-filling of shifts with locums, in order to enable Nunavut full time physicians to attend.

In addition, at each event, the president of the Nunavut Tunngavik Inc (Nunavut's Indigenous Organization) and the Deputy Minister of Health provided opening or closing remarks and acknowledged the valuable services of Nunavut's physicians.

More regular Nunavut-based CEPD events for physicians are now planned beyond the term of this project.

Key Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The most important outcomes of our project:

1. **Sustainable Plans Developed for On-going Relevant Professional Development:** The evaluations of the two CEPD events clearly show that the participating physicians valued the opportunity, not only to experience professional development relevant to Northern Practice, but also to have opportunities to discuss health systems challenges. The Department of Health has indicated an interest in continuing to provide CEPD events into the future. Another CEPD event is planned for April.
2. **Potential Sustainability of On-going Youth Health Career Promotion:** Youth participating in the 2018 camp indicated a considerable increase in interest in pursuing health careers. The evaluation report was very positive. Two partner organizations have indicated that they may be able to fund and/or lead these camps into the future.
3. **Information Sharing Between Northern and Remote jurisdictions:** The discussion following a panel discussion with key health services experts in other jurisdictions was evidence of the value of sharing information between rural and Northern jurisdictions. In addition, the linkages between Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre and the Nunavut Department of Health have been strengthened.

4. **Establishment of a Pediatrics Residency Position:** While pediatrics residency rotations existed in Nunavut, a new model has been developed which allows for rotations of longer duration, reducing the level of effort required for training new residents in shorter placements.

We also observed a number of outcomes that were unplanned. These include

- This partnership increased the momentum in discussions around enhancing the medical education opportunities in Nunavut. New residency placements created allow Nunavut administrators to recruit graduates familiar with their work environment, and also help to ensure that the pool of physicians practicing in Canada is familiar with rural and Northern issues.
- The Medical Affairs Unit has adopted Qaujigiartiit's Cultural Orientation App as an important part of its orientation package for physicians coming to Nunavut. They routinely send it to physicians in a package with their contracts. Qaujigiartiit's executive Director, Gwen Healey has indicated that this level of collaboration and integration was made possible through this project.
- Considerable turn-over has taken place within the Department of Health over the course of this project, including the departure of the main proponent of this project, Dr. MacDonald, former Chief of Staff. Dr. Francois deWet, the new Territorial Chief of Staff, has been making considerable changes that will no doubt have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of physicians in Nunavut. A sustainability plan and proposed annual cycle of recruitment and retention activities will be presented to the new Chief of Staff and new Senior Departmental officials for consideration as strategies and interventions evolve.

Lessons Learned

The experience of this project in Nunavut has further underscored the importance of meaningful engagement of relevant partners. For example, while Nunavut's Inuit organization did not have a tangible role in the project, their contributions to the planning were valuable, the organization gained an appreciation of the passion and sincerity that the physicians serving Nunavut was enhanced through their participation and observation of some of our activities, and NTI's President's opening / closing remarks at key activities were noted by physicians as enhancing their sense of being valued by the population they serve.

Key to the success of many initiatives, was the participation of physicians in determining the nature and scope of the projects. Every attempt was made to ensure that the CEPD events were physician-led, and that the topics to be discussed were identified by them as being relevant to their practice. This no doubt led to the success of the events. This underscores the importance of the Making it Work model's condition for success "not about us without us."

Sustaining a Stable Workforce in Nunavut

Based on the work of this project, recommendation for stabilizing the workforce in Nunavut include:

1. Conditions for success

- Consider developing a periodic cycle of population service needs, including data on health indicators, adequacy of services, and patient surveys
- To ensure on-going leadership commitment to recruitment and retention, develop an explicit recruitment and retention strategy and periodically present indicators of impact on quality and continuity of care of this strategy
- Create an annual cycle of activities of recruitment and retention activities to ensure that work is not focused on “fighting fires” created by vacancies, but that retention initiatives also receive regular attention.
- Build a clear budget for recruitment and retention into 5-year projections
- Advocate for funding to over-recruit beyond clinical need, to ensure physicians have protected time for community engagement, teaching and collegial professional development.

2. Recommended on-going activities

- Periodic re-assessment of service model and profile of target recruits
- Recruitment website refresh every five years and engagement of “as and when” communications firm to support on-going updates and announcements to be posted to the Nunavut Physician Recruitment web site.
- Continue to provide current version of the cultural orientation app to all new physicians
- Annual Continuing Education and Professional Development event for physicians
- Annual cultural activity days for physicians, similar to Government of Nunavut employee entitlements (“IQ days”)
- Involvement of physicians in recruitment decisions
- Continue to support youth health careers promotion
- Continue to support innovative models of health professional education, medical student and resident placements
- Advocacy for additional resources to support protected time for resident and medical student training and academic career development for Nunavut physicians.



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