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Remote Access: Sharing Knowledge to Transform Healthcare in First Nations Communities

by Edna M. Stevens, RN, BN & Lesley Larsen, BAppSc, MBA

ABSTRACT

An e-learning demonstration project involving 35 Manitoba First Nations communities and Tribal Councils; First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Manitoba Region; the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs; and Saint Elizabeth Health Care was undertaken to demonstrate the value of remote, dynamic access to knowledge and health human resources.

This initiative uses a web-based learning, collaboration and communication application to promote local capacity building and support providers and program management. A train-the-trainer concept, designed to create local 'champions', and self-training tools combine with implementation meetings to tailor uptake to specific needs, readiness and structures of each participating organization.

This usability study, led by Dr. Lynda Attack, demonstrates innovative use of ICTs in nursing practice. The comprehensive, external evaluation included a range of indicators: knowledge uptake, including computer skills and comfort as well as educational content; costs; user satisfaction; changes in practice; access to specialists; and barriers and enablers affecting use and access of remote education and support. A separate business case formed part of the final report.

The value of the application during this demonstration was clear and further illustrated by expanded use within Manitoba Region's First Nations. Innovative solutions are creatively overcoming various barriers and able to transform healthcare in rural/remote communities. The focus now is on sustainability and continually achieving greater benefit from the application.

Lessons learned and the best practices that emerge will serve as a tool for future e-learning and remote access initiatives, and support these communities, with their unique, diverse programs and services, as they move forward to more fully integrate e-learning and e-collaboration into operations and practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Edna M. Stevens, RN, BN

Edna Stevens, obtained her degree from the University of Manitoba and her Expanded Nurse Role certificate from McMaster's University. She has a valuable combination of hospital and community health nursing experience gained in Manitoba. Edna has also worked extensively as an outpost nurse in the expanded role in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and northern Alberta and Manitoba. In 1999, she became the Regional Home & Community Care (HCC) Coordinator and finds it challenging and rewarding to have planned, developed, coordinated, implemented and evaluated a HCC program for First Nations on-reserve in Manitoba Region. Edna is from Sapotaweyak Cree Nation, Manitoba.

Lesley Larsen, BAppSc, MBA

In her role as an Innovation Seeker at Saint Elizabeth Health Care, Lesley Larsen is involved in consultation and knowledge exchange, research projects, partnership initiatives, and international growth. For several years she has worked extensively with First Nations and Inuit health organizations as well as Health Canada at the national and regional levels, and was a member of the National Steering Committee for the Health Transition Fund First Nations Home and Community Care, Telehealth and Diabetes Pilot Projects. Lesley has an MBA from the University of Alberta and a Bachelor of Applied Science from the University of Guelph.