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## Increasing the diversity of the nursing profession: Lessons learned providing nursing education in remote Indigenous communities in Northern Canada

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Nursing is largely a white, female, middle class profession. There is increasing recognition that vulnerable minorities benefit from working with health professionals who understand their culture, language and life experience. This has led to nursing organizations such as the International Council of Nurses and the Canadian Nurses Association advocating for increased participation of underrepresented minorities in the nursing profession. In northern Canada, there are few health professionals who are representative of the local population. Northern Canada's population is made up of 85-90% Indigenous population. A history of colonization, reservation living, and residential schools, coupled with the current move away from traditional diet and ways of life, have left a legacy of poverty and illness, including high rates of accidental death, trauma and suicide, mental illness and addictions, cancer, heart disease and other health issues related to the social determinants of health. Health professionals are largely itinerant, coming to communities for two-three week stints and then returning south. They generally do not speak the language and may have limited knowledge of local culture and customs. In 2010, the College of Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan in western Canada engaged with two northern Saskatchewan communities to deliver nursing education in these communities. This presentation addresses the administrative, technological, political, and community development lessons learned in successfully providing nursing education to Indigenous people in rural and remote areas. The importance of university and government level commitment, the administrative structures in nursing education that promote community engagement, the vital nature of technology, and the recognition of the importance of community champions at all levels are recognized as key to success. The challenges of working with the K-12 system to ensure qualified applicants and of indigenization of nursing curricula are ongoing.

### Biography

Lois Berry completed her PhD in 2010 from the University of Saskatchewan, Department of Educational Administration, Saskatoon, Canada. She is currently the associate dean for North and North western Campus and Rural and Remote Engagement at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Nursing. She conducts research and publishes in the area of diversity, social justice, accessibility of health care, and health and education policy. She has been a nursing educator for over 35 years, as a clinical and classroom instructor and professor in programs at all levels of nursing, including LPN (LVN), diploma, baccalaureate, masters and PhD programs.

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