Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate: Researching Practice-Driven, Reality-Based Curriculum in British Columbia

Year 1 Report

What is the Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate?

The Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate is a seven course, 30-credit education program for registered nurses. It is being implemented over three years through a pilot project aimed at assessing and meeting the learning needs of rural RNs to ultimately improve rural practice and patient outcomes. All courses receive full academic credit at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The project represents a unique partnership between practice and the academy, and has been jointly driven by the Chief Nursing Officer Council (the CNOs) led by the CNOs of Northern and Interior Health Authorities and, beginning in Phase III, UNBC. The report of the findings of the action research evaluation of the RACNC during its first year of implementation, 2007 – 2008, is now available. The report is based on an analysis of surveys, course enrollment statistics, course reviews and interviews with students, their managers, instructors and program organizers.

Key Findings

- The partnership model, in which practice and university work together to develop and deliver nursing education is, indeed, a new way of working. The partnership driving the Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate is showing preliminary effectiveness and is critical to the program’s success in terms of relevance, accessibility and sustainability.

- The action research approach has allowed the Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate to be responsive to feedback and make necessary adjustments and improvements to the program, thereby meeting the needs of the University and the Health Authorities, as well as the students and instructors. It is critical that the action research evaluation continues over the three-year implementation of the pilot program.

- As with all new programs, there have been “bumps” in the first year; however, the students have given many examples of how the curriculum has positively influenced their practice. This is a key goal of the program, and illustrates the effectiveness of the practice-driven, reality-based curriculum approach in prompting change.

- The demand for this kind of program (i.e., relevant, responsive and accessible) is high.

Program implementation is progressing well. Preliminary evaluation results show that it is meeting its goals. Stable and committed funding is necessary for the Rural Acute Care Nursing Certificate to be sustained.

This project is under the auspices of the British Columbia CNO Council, led by Suzanne Johnston (Northern Health) and Tom Fulton (Interior Health).

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