NunaFam

Discipline of Family Medicine
Background

**NunaFam** is a collaboration between the Government of Nunavut, Dept. of Health, and Memorial University of Newfoundland

Established to work towards a model of sustainable medical practice of improved access to primary care, and overall health outcomes for the population of Nunavut

- Health Canada funded-$4.9 million for five year pilot project (2011-2016)

- 4 second year family medicine residents train in Nunavut for six months each academic year
Inuit people in socio-economic transition from a traditional hunter-gatherer way of life to wage based economy in settled communities

Inuit thrived in one of the harshest climates in the world
Until 1950’s lived hunter-gatherer lifestyle

Social upheaval produces poor health
Modeled on the NorFam program in Labrador

The Northern Family Medicine Education Program (NorFam), one of the country’s first rural, remote teaching programs, was established in 1991 following consultations with Labrador communities, Melville Hospital Board of Management and the Indigenous organizations of the Innu Nation and the Labrador Inuit Health Commission, and the Department of Health.

NorFam was developed to respond to the health needs of the Indigenous communities in Labrador.
Objectives

- Increase the number of appropriately trained long term family physicians in Nunavut
- Enhanced training for family medicine residents
- Establish a family practice teaching centre in Iqaluit
- More extensive collaboration with Memorial to improve access to both undergraduate and postgraduate medical training for Indigenous students
Tools for success

• experience
• building solid relationships
• support
• communication
• continuity
Recruitment & Retention:

• Graduates have signed long-term contracts to practice in Nunavut
• All graduates spent time practising in rural & remote locations
• The training model results in a significant increase in medical service to the territory

"we now have graduates who are top-level people being recruited...they’re training as doctors for rural/remote medicine & are signing contracts with Nunavut. It has stabilized medical practice there”

Dr. Sandy MacDonald
“When I tell people how much I love Nunavut, the next question is invariably “why?”. It is an important question but one that I didn’t immediately have an answer for. There are no great attractions, dining options are limited and the weather is particular. However, I soon realized that I had never met a more gentle and engaging group of people than the Inuit. My delight with Nunavut started with the people and continued eating raw whale skin in the ER, fishing for arctic char, hiking 100 km through the Arctic circle and snowmobiling between clinic days in fly-in communities. Mix in a collegial working environment with medicine that is unlike anywhere else and I can’t imagine not working in Nunavut. There are few certainties regarding my future practice but returning to Nunavut is one of them.”

Dr. Brett McCarthy
“Having grown up in the urban South with limited exposure to Indigenous communities, living and working in Iqaluit provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture of the North and learn alongside and from Inuit colleagues and patients. We are all aware of the health inequities affecting Indigenous groups, which are a direct result of colonization. As a white settler and a physician with a passion for global health and health equity, working in this context help me to develop cultural humility and a profound sense of the immense need for action on the social determinants of health. Having this exposure as a resident has influenced my practice in many ways. I apply the skills I learned related to trauma informed care and anti-oppressive care in my daily patient interactions. My future career plans and where I intend to work have also been shaped by this experience. Despite being from the South, exposure to the life, beauty, and mystery of the North has inspired me to continue to work in the Arctic; at present I am engaged in patient oriented research in Labrador and will be locuming and hopefully in the future working full time in a Northern community.”

Dr. Melanie van Soeren
“Six months up North is worth as much as two years in a lot of places south”

“Medicine like no other...unique”

“Love the people, their honesty and humour”

“It’s not a simple history or present being Inuit in Canada. Whether laughing with elders through a translator, or formal courses through the GN, learning about it and being immersed in it brings a richness of life that cannot be bought.”
Pond Inlet & Pangnirtung Community clinics
Nunavut is now a centre of medical education excellence

• Well-established educational community; research and teaching opportunities
• Three Nunavut physicians have participated in the 6 for 6 rural research program (with a focus on indigenous health)
• CPD & research supports
• Locally developed 60 priority topics for teaching – site driven, local expertise, indigenous focus.
• Dedicated medical education leadership

“the unanticipated outcome is people who are thinking about careers in the North now view it as an educational community, they have residents, it’s not just clinical service, it is more that that”
Transformation in practice

• Stabilized workforce - allows for local control of physician requirements and cost savings

• Focus on continuity of care: residents are assigned an outlying community during the rotation and are responsible for patient follow-up

• Wednesday afternoon academic half-days in the Iqaluit practice, for educational sessions and committee work

• Nunavut physicians participate in file review, interviews and ranking of applicants to ensure the best match to the site

• Residents are matched based on their experience and interest in rural/remote practice, indigenous health, health equity
Further collaboration to promote medical careers to indigenous students

The first Inuk student from Nunavut participated in the Aboriginal Health Initiative’s Healers of Tomorrow Gathering in 2017.

“It is no small feat...Happy to hear the partnership will continue so other young Inuit get opportunities in summers to come to experience the health careers camp and have the touch and feel of being within the walls of a medical school.”

~Nunavut physician

“...This camp has made me more aware of the paths I can take to succeed in the medical field and has made me much more excited to start my journey.”

~Ashley Newman
Kugluktuk, NU
Unanticipated Outcomes:

NunaFam has been the inspiration for a ground-breaking pediatrics training program with partners at NOSM and University of Ottawa where residents spend up to six months training to be community generalist pediatricians with a focus on Indigenous child health.

Iqaluit is one of three sites chosen as a model of recruitment and retention of rural family physicians by the National Task Force on Rural Medical Education and Training by the College of Family Physicians of Canada & the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada.
NunaFam & TRC recommendations for Aboriginal Health

• Residents do local outreach in high schools
• Complete local cultural competency training course (GN)
• Orientation materials pre-departure:
  
  Cultural competency modules (Nunavut program)  
  Inuit Story Bones – Historical trauma and trauma informed care  
  Words and Phrases in Inuktitut  
  Inuktitut for Health Professionals
MISSION
“Working in the spirit of partnership and respect, the Faculty of Medicine is committed to delivering integrated excellence in education, research, and evidence informed care; meeting the unique health needs of our rural, remote and urban communities; and advocating for health, equity, Indigenous health and healthy populations.”

VISION
“Through excellence, we will integrate education, research and social accountability to advance the health of the people and communities we serve.”

- Sustainable partnerships to improve health equity; the communities we serve are actively engaged
- Graduates remain in communities to support underserved, rural & remote areas
- Developing partnerships that strengthen community capacity in underserved populations and rural and remote areas
- Evaluating and enhancing our programs in alignment with community needs
- Weave social accountability into everything we do
- Communication and collaboration amongst learners, faculty, staff and community partners
Sustainability & Growth

• The Government of Nunavut has approved ongoing funding to continue the NunaFam program beyond the pilot phase.

• NunaFam is now a permanent part of the family medicine residency program.

• Future plans to include Memorial FM undergraduate learners: earlier and longer the exposure = connections & commitment.

• Discussions regarding a dedicated seat in the medical school for Nunavut.
Thank you....