



BRIEF

Nursing Education Consolidation (2013)

One of the professional self-regulating functions of the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNNL) is the approval of basic nursing education programs offered in this province. An ARNNL approval designation assures the public that program graduates are prepared as safe, competent, and ethical entry-level practitioners who meet the requirements for licensure and professional practice as registered nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is in this capacity that ARNNL is raising concern and expressing our belief that every effort needs to be made to proceed with the consolidation of nursing education in the province. We are now at least two years behind on the projected timeline. This delay is having a significant impact on the delivery of our nursing education programs.

Background

There are three nursing schools in the province: Memorial University School of Nursing (MUNSON); Centre for Nursing Studies (CNS); and Western Regional School of Nursing (WRSON). Consolidation of nursing education was first introduced in the 2005 *Foundations for Success: White Paper on Post-Secondary Education*. In this paper, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador “direct the Departments of Education and Health and Community Services, in conjunction with the Schools of Nursing and appropriate stakeholders, to discuss implementing a consolidated model that provides for the administration of nursing education, including continuing education and other programs such as the Practical Nursing program and the Nurse Practitioner program within Memorial University.” The proposed consolidated model included a new Faculty of Nursing on the St. John’s campus and an autonomous School of Nursing on Grenfell Campus – Memorial University.

During the past eight years, there have been numerous planning and steering committees and, consequently, agreement in principle from the Boards of Eastern Health (2008), Western Health (2008), and Memorial University (May 28, 2009) to proceed with consolidation. In May 2010, the Memorial University Board of Regents approved the policy paper on Nursing Education Consolidation and directed the development of a process and timeline (an implementation plan) for their review/approval. In late fall 2010, Memorial University’s Internal Working Group on Nursing Education Consolidation was established. The Internal Working Group and its five subcommittees developed a plan for consolidation for a fall 2012 intake of students. Further, a functional space plan was developed for two new buildings to house nursing education on the St. John’s campus and for WRSON on Memorial’s Grenfell Campus.

The four labour unions impacted by the plan to consolidate were engaged in the planning process. Faculty, staff and students at the three schools were anticipating consolidation in 2012 and were supportive.

As delays were again reported, ARNNL hosted a meeting to strategize on how to move consolidation forward. In January 2012, the Honourable Joan Shea, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, responded to a letter from ARNNL and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador that advocated for action. In her response, Minister Shea stated that Government remains committed to the principle of consolidation within Memorial University.

Memorial University submitted a strategic funding initiative to the Government for consideration in Budget 2013. The budget did not allocate resources for consolidation.

Impact

Consolidation of nursing education is beneficial for the nursing profession, government, and most importantly, the public. Moving forward with the implementation plan in a timely manner is imperative, as consolidation will strengthen nursing education and advance knowledge in nursing practice, education, and research – all of which directly impact the quality of nursing and health services in the province, and ultimately, the public's health. Nursing education consolidation needs to proceed for many reasons:

- Limited current infrastructure may impact projected seat increases in any Bachelor of Nursing (BN) (Collaborative) Program Options limiting the future supply of registered nurses in our province.
- A Consortium Agreement that governs the BN (Collaborative) program across the three schools of nursing is 14-years-old and is not sustainable with the current divergent needs of the programs geographically. The CNS and WRSON cannot offer the BN (Collaborative) program without an agreement of this type.
- The Fast-Track Option of the BN (Collaborative) program requires significant revision to become two autonomous programs at MUNSON and WRSON post-consolidation. The delay in consolidation is impacting program quality.
- In past accreditation processes, a commitment was made to consolidate nursing education. It is possible that the next review may not be as favourable if it is determined that nursing education has not been stabilized through consolidation.
- Delayed consolidation is exacerbating the nursing faculty shortage as continued uncertainty is challenging faculty recruitment and retention. Having one employer through consolidation will maximize the strategic use of all faculty, particularly in St. John's.
- The planned consolidated model houses all nursing programs within MUN. This is important to achieve the highest program standards, decrease competition for nursing faculty between institutions, ensure the maximal use of faculty expertise across Programs, and ensure the most efficient planning of clinical placements.
- University students should be on a university campus with all the attendant benefits including the full slate of student services and intercollegiate atmosphere so beneficial to student life. This is currently not the case for CNS and WRSON students.
- The CNS and WRSON are the only nursing schools in Canada governed by regional health authorities whose primary mandate is health care delivery. Moving these schools into the university is congruent with national standards.

Faculty and other stakeholders have invested significant time and effort into planning consolidation and transitioning all of its nursing education programs for consolidation. Faculty needs to move forward to focus their efforts on the advancement of nursing education and research – not continuous planning for consolidation.

Overall, 1,550 student enrolments occur annually at MUNSON, CNS and WRSON. In addition, approximately 120 nursing professionals enrol in continuing education programs or undergo competency-based assessment at CNS.

ARNNL needs a commitment from Government, in particular the Departments of Health and Community Services and Advanced Education and Skills, to join with the nursing community to advocate for and support the consolidation of nursing education in the province.