

FYI: promoting island health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 29, 2014

Partnership promotes nurse practitioner role in Aboriginal health

Island Health and the First Nations Health Authority are working together to increase the number of nurse practitioners (NPs) who provide care to First Nations communities and Aboriginal individuals and families.

“Nurse practitioners are an integral part of the health care system and this Island Health and First Nations Health Authority partnership will help find ways to ensure improved access to care for First Nations and Aboriginal communities,” said Health Minister Terry Lake.

The First Nations Health Authority has provided a \$145,000 grant to Island Health to support hiring nurse practitioners and start-up of their practices.

“Nurse practitioners play an important role in delivering primary care services to First Nations communities in BC and this funding is intended to alleviate some of the cost pressures associated with the hiring and start-up of an NP practice,” said Richard Jock, Vice-President of Policy, Planning and Strategic Services with the First Nations Health Authority.

Jock said the partnership with Island Health on initiatives like this provides opportunities for shared resources and to support and learn from NPs working in First Nations communities by engaging them in dialogue about best practices, lessons learned and challenges.

“The First Nations Health Authority values working closely with Island Health to improve health service delivery to First Nations communities on Vancouver Island, including opportunities like this that will result in more NPs serving BC First Nations individuals, families, and communities,” Jock said.

A working group has been established to determine the most effective use of the grant. It may be used for cultural safety training, set-up costs, equipment, nurse practitioner mentoring and other costs that will enhance NP services to First Nations communities.

“This generous one-time contribution from the First Nations Health Authority is much appreciated,” said Ian Knipe, Director of Aboriginal Health for Island Health.

Joanne Maclaren, chair of Island Health’s Nurse Practitioner steering committee, said NPs are well-suited to meeting the needs of Aboriginal clients and patients. When recent hiring procedures are complete, Island Health will have 47 nurse practitioners across the region serving many populations, including a particular focus on primary health care.

“Nurse practitioners are nurses with advanced knowledge and clinical skills and provide a full range of primary health care,” said Maclaren. “They are able to complete health assessments, diagnose illness, order lab tests and medications and refer to specialists. Often these activities occur in non-traditional medical settings such as Friendship Centres and homes and include families in health promotion and teaching.”



Nurse practitioner Françoise Juneau finds it rewarding to provide care for Aboriginal patients at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Esquimalt First Nation, Scia'new First Nation at Beecher Bay and Pacheedaht First Nation in Port Renfrew.

“First Nations communities have been really supportive of the work that I do. People have been really open and accepting. I feel valued when I’m out in the communities,” she said.

Juneau, who has Mi’kmaq and Montagnais ancestry, received a Master of Nursing from McGill University in Montreal and a Diploma in Outpost Nursing from Dalhousie University in Halifax on her way to becoming a nurse practitioner. She worked with Aboriginal clients in northwest Ontario and Manitoba before moving to Victoria to work as a Registered Nurse at the Cool Aid Community Health Centre.

Juneau is grateful to the Cool Aid Community Health Centre for supporting her transition to the role of nurse practitioner for Island health where she is one of four NPs who care predominantly for First Nations and Aboriginal clients. Several more NPs provide outreach to First Nation communities.

Juneau welcomes the challenges of her role. “It’s never boring. Every day is different. It’s interesting – not just what we see clinically but also in the opportunity to work with families and the rest of the communities. I’m always learning something whether is about a community’s history or through interesting conversations that I have.”

Out of personal and professional interest, Juneau has educated herself about how historic events have created lasting traumas throughout the First Nations and Aboriginal population and how adversity and poverty contribute to long-term health problems.

Juneau is encouraged by the increased focus on Aboriginal health that she has seen in recent years.

“I’m becoming more optimistic. There’s a lot more awareness, a lot more respect,” she said.

-30-

Cutline: Maria Sampson receives care from nurse practitioner Françoise Juneau at Victoria Native Friendship Centre.

South Island Media Inquiries

Sarah Plank
Media Relations Manager
Phone: 250.727.4275
Email: sarah.plank@viha.ca

First Nations Health Authority Media Inquiries

Trevor Kehoe
Communications Officer and Media Relations
First Nations Health Authority
604-831-4898
trevor.kehoe@fnha.ca