2012 Best Practices Reader

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Sectors:
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Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) - Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative

The Inspiration ~ A vision of Elder, Joe Sylvester
Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) is a vision of the late Elder, Joe Sylvester. Initial efforts began with a diabetes research project, and then grew into a more comprehensive approach to health care for the Aboriginal community. Anishnawbe Health Resources was incorporated in 1984. One objective was “to recover, record and promote Traditional Aboriginal practices where possible and appropriate”.

The Focus ~ Traditional Indigenous Healing
Focus is on improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples in spirit, mind, emotion and body by providing Traditional Indigenous Healing within a multi-disciplinary health care model. Health care services at AHT are provided by dedicated practitioners from across health care disciplines.

The Story ~ Healing as the Central Model
The medicine wheel symbolizes an Aboriginal concept of healing, that includes harmony within physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of health. Health care is holistic, involving an inter-disciplinary team of Western and Traditional health care practitioners. Primary health care services to Aboriginal Peoples in Toronto focus on well-being and disease prevention using an Indigenous paradigm of healing as the central model. AHT also provides services including: traditional healing, diabetes outreach, assessments for foetal alcohol spectrum disorders and mental health and addictions services.

Making a Difference in the Community ~ International and Local Interest
AHT is a unique health centre serving the approximately 80,000 Aboriginal People in Toronto. Programs are grounded in Aboriginal culture and tradition, allowing clients to develop a trusting relationship with their healthcare providers at the clinic, thereby encouraging greater treatment outcomes and healing practices. Other healthcare organizations, both across Canada and internationally, visit AHT to learn about their model of care so that they may integrate the approach to their work.

Words of Praise ~ Holistic Approach is Best
Client: “I’ve got a lot of health issues and I’m getting to address them not only by seeing a regular GP, but I also have the balance of more holistic, homeopathic and spiritual alternatives and complimentary health services. It is a big deal for me.”
Client: “The Holistic approach, looking at the whole person is used. Like the medicine wheel: spiritual, mental, emotional and physical.”

Sharing your Best Practice and Reaching out ~ Training and Educating Students
The Aboriginal population has often experienced cultural insensitivities as well as subtle and overt racism when receiving healthcare services. The Anishnawbe Health Toronto Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative seeks to train all 57,000 students enrolled in Ontario Colleges and Universities’ health sciences programs in the area of culturally competent healthcare practice. In undertaking this initiative, AHT has developed a course curricula in Aboriginal cultural safety, has trained 35 Aboriginal preceptors (instructors) to deliver this module across Ontario and promoted the program through community gatherings, a website and distributing informational resources to post-secondary institutions to increase the uptake of this program within health sciences programs in Colleges and Universities in Ontario.

Overcoming Challenges ~ Understanding that Aboriginal Peoples Have Unique Needs
The current challenge is that there is limited time in health sciences curriculum programs to invite Aboriginal preceptors to be guest lecturers. Secondly, several program directors perceive that it is not necessary to have distinct curriculum time for Aboriginal health, aside from teaching about diversity in general. Many of them have failed to understand that Aboriginal Peoples have a unique history, rooted in colonial policies, which have left them with unique needs that are distinct from other minority populations.

The Best Practice Tool ~ Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative Seminar
The Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative is an educational seminar for health sciences students in Colleges and Universities in Ontario. They are trained in the area of Aboriginal cultural competency and cultural safety. This seminar includes three teaching modules viz. Indigenous worldviews, impacts of colonization (Indian Act, Residential School System); Social determinants of health for Aboriginal Peoples and resultant health outcomes and concepts of health and healing in an Aboriginal context. The volunteer preceptors (instructors) are Aboriginal people who share their lived experiences with students, including experiences of direct and systemic racism and oppression, family histories within residential schools, etc. These firsthand accounts are an essential component in this best practice model.

Vision for the future ~ Culturally safe health care to Aboriginal Peoples
It is hoped that all health care practitioners will provide culturally safe health care to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. In this way the collective health outcome of Aboriginal Peoples will be improved. For instance, cultural safety involves collaborative, respectful, egalitarian and empathic relationships between healthcare providers and patients/clients.

Contact Information
Dr. C. P. Shah, Program Director
Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative
225 Queen Street East, Toronto ON M5A 1S4
Tel: 416-360-0486
Fax: 416-365-1083
E-mail: cshah@ah.ca
Website: http://www.ah.ca/