

THE CNFS IS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING FRENCH-LANGUAGE HEALTH SERVICES IN FRANCOPHONE MINORITY COMMUNITIES.

TO THIS END, IT WORKS IN COLLABORATION WITH ITS MEMBER INSTITUTIONS — UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES PRESENT IN FRANCOPHONE MINORITY COMMUNITIES — TO DELIVER THE POSTSECONDARY TRAINING REQUIRED TO DEVELOP FRANCOPHONE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.

A STARTING POINT

Armed with the knowledge that immigration contributes to the demographic, economic and social development of Francophone minority communities, the *Consortium national de formation en santé* (CNFS) has for some years been examining the situation of internationally educated Francophone health professionals (IEFHPs). The CNFS and its partners¹ have joined forces to find proactive solutions designed to address two major issues in the immigration field, namely the professional training and integration of qualified newcomers to Canada.

FIRST STEPS

In recent years, the effects of the shortage of health professionals have been more sharply felt throughout Canada's health care system — and to an even greater extent within Francophone minority communities. The recruitment, integration and retention of internationally educated Francophone health professionals are proving crucial to increasing the accessibility of French-language health services in Francophone minority communities. For these professionals, the major obstacle to their integration is the lack of services, training and resources in French. Moreover, there are many other barriers to overcome, including:

- Lack of information available prior to immigrating;
- Difficulty obtaining recognition for their credentials, in French;
- Need for upgrading training in their fields;
- Difficulty obtaining clinical placements;
- Complexity of licensing policies;
- Financial difficulties related to the high cost of the overall process.

Evaluating, in French, the credentials of internationally educated health professionals

To address this issue, the CNFS held three regional consultations — in the West, Ontario, and the Maritimes—in the winter of 2008. Its objective was to identify the challenges involved in providing French-language credential evaluation services in each of these regions. One of the measures recommended by the three consultations was to mobilize all the partners involved in delivering French-language credential evaluation services for internationally educated health professionals.

Toward a national support network?

On December 1, 2008, the CNFS held a meeting in Ottawa for representatives of national and provincial organizations and institutions involved in granting equivalencies for IEFHPs' credentials. A majority of the participants were interested in seeing an informal support network established, which would make it easier for organizations to disseminate and share information and could also promote discussion around best practices in hiring IEFHPs.

¹ The partners of the CNFS in the project to train internationally educated Francophone health professionals include the University of Ottawa and La Cité collégiale, in Ottawa; the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, in Winnipeg; and the Campus Saint-Jean, in Edmonton. The partners of the CNFS in pilot projects to promote the social and professional integration of internationally educated Francophone health graduates include the Université de Moncton, Edmundston campus; the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, in Winnipeg; and La Cité collégiale, in Ottawa.

IEHGs experience three types of outcomes when seeking to have their credentials recognized, namely:

- 1) Obtaining employment in their field;**
- 2) Obtaining employment in a related field, often requiring lower qualifications;**
- 3) Dropping out of their field.**

(L'Intégration des Diplômés internationaux en santé francophones dans les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire, report by C. Belkhdja et al., 2009)

Developments

This national meeting opened the door to a first inter-institution project involving the CNFS, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT), and McMaster University. This collaboration focuses primarily on adapting into French the *Occupational Therapy Examination Preparation Project (OTEpp)* for internationally educated occupational therapists who have immigrated or are preparing to immigrate to Canada. The CNFS intends to include this project in its action plan for the coming years.

Training

The CNFS is playing a central role in training health professionals for Francophone minority communities through the health education programs offered by its 11 member institutions, which represents a natural basis for collaboration in developing training tailored to the situation of internationally educated Francophone health professionals.

Intercultural training

In the fall of 2008, the CNFS launched an intercultural training program for individuals working with internationally educated Francophone health professionals. Developed in collaboration with the *Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface* and *La Cité collégiale*, this training was offered in Ottawa and Winnipeg during the winter of 2009. For further information, visit <http://cnfs.net/alaffiche/formation-interculturelle>. This training for trainers will be offered in 2009-2010 by a few of the CNFS's member institutions that have already identified trainers for their regions. Transferring applied knowledge will support existing local initiatives designed to promote the integration of internationally educated Francophone health professionals.

A preparatory program for professional licensing examinations

La Cité collégiale, in partnership with the University of Ottawa, launched a program preparing IEFHPs for the professional licensing examinations in nursing and practical nursing.² This program, which consists of seven courses and two workshops, has received the official backing of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO). The courses will be delivered by *La Cité collégiale's* continuing education branch starting in the fall of 2009. The *Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface* (CUSB) is also interested in offering this program starting in January 2010. Related discussions are underway with the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba. The CNFS is planning to enrich the content of both training programs in 2009-2010 and to develop other upgrading and bridging programs in collaboration with educational institutions and professional colleges.

OPTIONS TO EXPLORE

Integrating internationally educated Francophone health graduates (IEHGs) into Francophone minority communities

In 2008, the CNFS asked the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM) to conduct a Canada-wide study³ on the factors affecting IEHGs' professional and social integration into Francophone minority communities. This study, which was completed in March 2009, provides a snapshot of the situation of IEHGs. It contains statistical data, an immigration literature review, an analysis of personal experiences, and input from trainers and people working with IEHGs. The report presents the solutions proposed by the graduates from three major regions of the country who were interviewed for the research. Some factors that may facilitate IEHGs' integration include:

- Adjustment mechanisms providing IEHGs with better access to upgrading training;
- Accurate information on the credential evaluation process and on professional and social integration into Canada;
- Obtaining Canadian employment experience without being fully licensed;
- Integration into the workplace culture in Canada.

Using the findings from this research, the CNFS was able to develop local integration models, in collaboration with local stakeholders involved in the professional and social integration of IEHGs. Since May 2009, these models have been applied in pilot projects underway in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Edmundston. These locations were chosen because they provide different backdrops for the integration of IEHGs.

² For further information on these courses, contact La Cité collégiale at (613) 742-2483, extension 2349 or 2588.

³ The final report of this research is available, in French only, on the website of CNFS at <http://cnfs.net/publications/autres>

Three pilot projects

These pilot projects share the same objective, namely to devise integration models specific to the chosen areas and create a “single window” for services to the IEHGs in these regions. The CNFS has forged local partnerships with *La Cité collégiale* in Ottawa, the *Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface* in Winnipeg, and the *Université de Moncton* in Edmundston to support the implementation of the single windows. These institutions have development officers, whom the CNFS has involved in these projects. These officers are responsible for the follow up of the IEHG “clients” who have agreed to participate in the pilot projects. Their interventions will primarily involve providing holistic support that facilitates the integration process, in collaboration with welcoming organizations, community associations, provincial professional colleges, health authorities, or local hospitals as potential employers. The gamut of resources available in communities is important. Through its pilot projects, the CNFS plans to maximize the use of these resources and thereby strengthen the coordination required within these host communities.

These pilot projects will constitute a source of important and accurate data, which will be compiled during the final evaluation and retained to provide future guidance. This data will be useful to the CNFS and all its partners involved in immigration.

UPCOMING INITIATIVES

Thanks to this first foray into the immigration field, the CNFS and its partners successfully brought into sharper focus issues around the professional and social integration of internationally educated health graduates into Francophone minority communities.

Buoyed by this outcome, the CNFS turned its vision for the integration of internationally educated health graduates into a five-year action plan that will help improve access to French-language services. Its strategic objectives for its future immigration initiatives are a reflection of its mandate, which is to improve French-language health services through the provision of postsecondary training for Francophone health professionals.

In coming years, the CNFS wants, among other things, to serve as an incubator for ideas and pilot projects that will directly counter barriers to the integration of internationally educated Francophone health professionals. It is planning to **monitor** the Strategic Plan developed by the Citizenship and Immigration Canada – Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee and federal and provincial government partners to identify measures with the potential to support the professional integration of IEHGs (through, for example, the provision of income support or targeted educational grants).

The Consortium will continue to **analyse IEHGs’ needs** with respect to training and services that can facilitate their professional integration and will continue striving with its partners to satisfactorily address these needs. At the same time, efforts will be made to strengthen **collaboration with professional colleges**, which will improve the French-language services provided to IEHGs and make it easier for them to enter their professions.

AND WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The immigration issue is still relatively new to the CNFS. The work accomplished over the past two years has laid the groundwork for addressing the needs of internationally educated Francophone professionals and graduates. The CNFS and its partners are aware of the complexity of this issue, the particularities of individual cases, and the regional contexts in which they occur. However, with the commitment and full collaboration of all the players involved in these initiatives, fast progress is being made. The CNFS will maintain continuity in its efforts and achieve lasting outcomes, particularly through its pilot projects and innovative partnerships.

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