Students learn through Aboriginal wellness model

Health care assistants (HCAs) looking to gain specialized knowledge in acute care can do so in just a few months at Native Education College (NEC) — while also learning an Indigenous approach to wellness.

“The acute care certificate gives students the understanding, skills and attitude to be able to work within an acute care setting, where patients tend to be very complex,” says Masooma Qasimi, acting health sciences program manager at NEC. “We are currently working to Indigenize the curriculum and we promote learning through an Aboriginal wellness model.

“We also encourage our students to share their personal experiences in regards to traditional Aboriginal practices, have elders come in and share their knowledge, and advocate for our students to go into their home communities to provide a culturally sensitive approach in acute care settings.”

Because of the complexities associated with acute care, applicants must have an HCA certification from a recognized training program and a minimum of 500 cumulative employment hours in the past three years, among other requirements.

Building on students’ previous knowledge and skills, the program broadens their skill set in monitoring the health status of acute care patients and becoming aware of any changes from treatments and interventions. It also increases confidence with equipment commonly used for acute care patients.

“In class we do a lot of discussions, group work and use multiple teaching tools,” says Qasimi. “There is also a lab component during which students practice their skills. Our lab has all the equipment students would find in a health care setting, which makes training practical. Students also complete 70 hours of clinical practicum.”

In addition to the acute certificate program, NEC also offers palliative care and mental health programs for HCAs. Both of these programs can be completed directly after completion of an HCA certification from a recognized training program.

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