

Serendipity leads forensic nursing to the Yukon



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According to Wikipedia, serendipity refers to “the accident of finding something good or useful while not specifically searching for it” or “a happy surprise”. A chance meeting with Deborah Crosby at the 2011 International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) Scientific Assembly in Montreal led to such a happening. Deb is the nurse in charge of a primary health care centre in Carmacks, YT, serving a population of more than 500 people. She is a member of both NENA and IAFN. She has also worked as a sexual assault nurse examiner in Ontario. She approached me after attending a session on nurse examiner programs, which I co-presented. She was interested in the most current practices in the forensic nurse examiner role, as she often is called on to perform examinations in her centre. She asked if it would ever be possible to have a nurse examiner course delivered in the Yukon. We both went on our way. However, I was impressed with her enthusiasm and desire to improve the services provided to those who have sexual violence in their lives.

Through Deb, I was linked with Dr. Anne Williams, a medical practitioner in Whitehorse, Yukon. Dr. Williams is part of a Sexual Assault Response Committee (SARC), a community-based multidisciplinary committee committed to working to develop a community response to sexual violence. To make a long story short, in September 2012, Janet Calnan (NENA President Elect) and I went to Whitehorse and delivered the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) Nurse Examiner Adult/Adolescent Core Education: Theoretical Aspects course. The 45-hour, three-credit course was delivered over six days with 13 registered nurses attending from various areas of the Yukon. A nurse practitioner from Manitoba also attended the course. Janet and I also did a four-hour workshop for medical practitioners on child maltreatment and adult/adolescent updates in sexual violence. In less than a year, this first-ever course in the territories came to fruition. A “happy surprise” indeed! Our gratitude goes out to the SARC committee for this wonderful educational opportunity.

Reference

Serendipity. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serendipity>

The course was held at the beautiful Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre on the banks of the Yukon River where we were able to watch master carvers carving a totem pole. We were also featured on CBC radio, CBC TV “Northbeat” and in the Whitehorse Star newspaper. The goal of these media events was to create community awareness and support for the SARC committee as it moves forward with its response to sexual violence plan.

We were also able to visit the Whitehorse General Emergency Department and then another serendipity moment... the emergency physician on duty was one of the Regina Pasqua Hospital Emergency Department interns from my days there as an ER nurse!

Deb also acted as our tour guide both in Whitehorse and on a day trip to Kluane National Park and Reserve, which took us through spectacular scenery mile after mile on the Alaska Highway. The highlight was Sheep Mountain, where Deb’s eagle eye spotted flocks of Dall sheep... on Sheep Mountain! The Kluane Lake, which is the largest lake in the Yukon, offered colours that were ever changing and made you hold your breath in awe.

This is the short story of how two long-standing NENA and IAFN members (who also happen to be two of the four co-founders of the Forensic Nurses Society of Canada [FNSC]) were able to bring forensic nursing concepts to the Yukon. The SARC committee is moving forward with the last steps to implement the coordinated response to patients who present for care following sexual violence.

Our thanks go out to many: Deborah Crosby for her unwavering desire to bring a nurse examiner course to the Yukon; to Dr. Anne Williams for her time, energy and support, which led to making this course actually happen; to Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre for its lovely facility; to Christina Sim, street nurse with Kwanlin Dün, for her coordination of the course logistics; to every course attendee; and special thanks to Janet Calnan, my co-instructor. 