CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses

At a Glance

- Language and professional communication skills are essential for nurses, but are often a barrier for internationally educated nurses seeking registration and employment in Canada.
- An important bridging model, CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses has helped immigrant nurses move from pre-registration to fulfilling the requirements of the College of Nurses of Ontario, achieving registration, and moving into nursing in Ontario.
- Leaders of similar organizations seeking to help internationally educated professionals can learn from this model.

This profile is part of a series of reports spotlighting initiatives that address one or more of the important factors that affect the success of employers in attracting and retaining new immigrants and integrating them into Canadian workplaces and communities. It is based on literature and interviews with leaders in the organizations profiled. The intention of the series is to recognize that a globally competitive immigration system is a vital part of Canada’s growth.

THE ISSUE

The effective integration of immigrants into Canada, including the recognition of their credentials and optimal use of their skills, is critical for several reasons. Skilled immigrants come to Canada expecting to put their training and experience to use in
appropriate work settings. The regions and employers that welcome them depend on these skills to support labour force stability and growth in targeted industries and professions. However, language and professional communication is often a barrier for internationally educated professionals who seek licensure in regulated professions and employment in their new communities.

As health providers, nurses must be skilled in language and communication—skills that are essential to the delivery of safe and effective patient care. Internationally educated nurses (IENs) arriving in Canada must pass a registration exam to practice as registered nurses or registered practical nurses, and doing so is influenced by linguistic ability and cultural factors. IENs need core language skills, but to be successful in securing registration and employment, and to practice effectively, they also need to understand Canadian-specific conventions for interacting and communicating with patients, families, and co-workers. Learning such soft skills is only one of the many challenges facing IENs, and this is where bridging programs play a role.

Language and communication are often barriers for internationally educated professionals who seek licensure in their profession and employment in their new communities.

This profile spotlights CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses, an organization that supports internationally educated nurses in their journey to become both licensed in Ontario and well positioned to enter the nursing workforce.

THE SOLUTION: CARE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED NURSES

CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses is an Ontario-based, not-for-profit bridging program for IENs. CARE is an acronym for “Creating Access to Regulated Employment.” The program operates with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, along with some support for training programs through the Government of Canada. CARE Centre supports the integration of IENs through customized case management, helping IENs access academic supports, secure their registration in the province, and transition to appropriate employment.

CARE Centre’s head office is in Toronto. It operates satellite offices in Windsor, London, Hamilton, Peel Region, and Kingston, and provides services in many areas of southern Ontario, including Halton and Niagara regions and Kitchener-Waterloo.

THE ACTIVITIES

IENs begin their journey to registration as a nurse in Ontario with a Letter of Direction from the College of Nurses of Ontario. This letter advises IENs of the requirements they need to meet to achieve their nursing registration. Based on the individual IEN’s education and expertise, some academic courses may be required. One such course is Nursing in Ontario, developed by CARE Centre with one of its original academic partners, George Brown College, and now available through other colleges and universities.

Each member of CARE Centre is then connected with a case manager, who works with the individual to develop a customized plan of action for achieving milestones in the registration process. IENs are supported through a range of activities, including language and communication programs, exam preparation, observational job shadowing, a variety of workshops, and alumni networking. (See Exhibit 1.)

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION FOR NURSES

CARE Centre offers three workplace-focused language and communication skills courses for IENs who have achieved the Canadian Language Benchmark 7 or higher. The goal of the program is to help IENs maximize their potential as current and future members of Canadian health care workplaces. The course content goes beyond core language skills: it helps IENs develop the soft skills that are critical to effective nursing practice in
Canadian workplaces. Emphasis is placed on building awareness and expertise in culturally appropriate language and communication skills. The program (delivered both virtually and in the classroom) addresses core functions such as nurse-client interviews, telephone communication, and documentation and reporting. Participants receive manuals and reference guides to take away, in addition to audio and video materials for use in the classroom and in CARE Centre’s online “e-Learning Lounge.” Increasingly, these courses are being delivered on-site at workplaces in response to employers who are committed to providing such supports for IENs and English as a Second Language nurses on staff.

**Exam Preparation and Review Course**
CARE Centre offers a course for IENs that helps prepare them for either the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) or the Canadian Registered Practical Nurse Examination (CRPNE). CARE Centre offers this course at a competitive price, and has recently undertaken a thorough revision to reflect changes in the national licensing exam.

**Observational Job Shadowing**
Observational job shadowing is designed to help expose IENs to the scope of the role of nurses in Ontario. It is available to those who have either secured or are in the process of securing their registration. The activity is offered through partnership with several organizations in various sub-sectors of health care and is strictly observational. Expert nurses have enthusiastically embraced their roles as mentors in the program and consistently request additional CARE Centre members to participate in their places of work.

**Employment Strategies Workshops and Professional Development**
CARE Centre offers a number of workshops for IENs actively seeking employment. Topics include job search strategies, interview skills, resumés, and cover letters. It also provides IENs with access to affordable (or sometimes free) professional development workshops so they have further exposure to nursing and health care issues as they build their portfolios. Video conferencing has been used for these workshops to connect participants across multiple geographic settings.

**Alumni Activities**
The Centre offers a number of networking and mentoring opportunities for IENs—both those who have gained their registration and are now employed and those who are working toward these goals. Many alumni are actively involved in helping newer IENs “learn the ropes” in Ontario health care, and help direct them to employment and other opportunities.

**The Impact**
CARE Centre’s impact over the more than 10 years since its inception has been well demonstrated: over 1,000 IENs who have accessed CARE Centre programs and academic upgrading have passed their registration exams and continued their nursing career in Canada. The pass rate for IENs who prepare for their registration exam with CARE Centre is over 80 per cent. In contrast, IENs in 2007–08 who prepared on their own
had a pass rate of 66 per cent. Over 90 per cent of CARE Centre participants secure a nursing position within a year of completing the program. CARE Centre has collaborated with various academic and community partners and has actively supported bridging programs for nurses based out of employer organizations and schools of nursing throughout southern Ontario.

Through its satellite offices and video-conferencing component, CARE Centre is present in many communities throughout Ontario. This is important because IENs settle, and are needed, in many communities outside of large cities like Toronto. The Centre’s presence helps foster a local nursing workforce that better reflects the diversity of the communities. According to Tina Novotny, CARE Centre Marketing and Communications Coordinator, “CARE Centre graduates are liaisons and ambassadors for a great number of immigrant communities, helping them address their health concerns in their own cultural context.”

The observational job-shadowing experience facilitated by CARE Centre has proven to be invaluable for IENs. As one participant noted, it exposes IENs “to the real work environment in Ontario health care settings, where IENs can get experience, develop professional confidence, learn communication in the workplace, and establish new networking opportunities.” This has helped prepare CARE Centre graduates for workplace realities—in particular interactions with patients, families, and other members of the multidisciplinary team.

CARE Centre has undergone service expansion in southwestern Ontario each year since 2005. In 2010–11, the organization invested in video-conferencing equipment by joining the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN). Through OTN, CARE Centre has been able to partner with other member institutions to successfully deliver course curricula through video conferencing. With the addition of distance learning, CARE Centre is set to extend access to its programs and expertise into more and different areas of the province.

**KEYS TO SUCCESS**

CARE Centre’s success in helping IENs become more fully integrated into Canadian workplaces stems from several factors. Because its positive outcomes ultimately depend on strong core services, leaders at CARE Centre continually anticipate changes in the regulatory and health care environments and address the evolving needs of IENs through pragmatic responses and advocacy efforts. For example, the language and communication curriculum has been carefully researched and developed in consultation with nurses. A strong alliance with Canadian employers and workplaces has resulted in course content that is both practical and culturally relevant. This helps ensure that IENs who take CARE Centre’s program of language and communication succeed in their goals of securing employment following registration.

The CARE Centre’s practical and culturally relevant course content helps internationally educated professionals secure employment following registration.

By using a case management model, CARE Centre is able to provide personalized direction that IENs often need as they navigate the system to obtain nursing registration and employment in Ontario. This client-centred approach supports IENs in making decisions about their options and implementing their choices. A graduate of the program commented that “[t]he success of CARE Centre lies in its well-designed program and customized action plan, unique to each client.”

CARE Centre has actively pursued partnerships and collaboration as it has expanded to meet IEN, community, and employer needs. These partnerships have brought numerous benefits, such as reaching IENs in outlying regions and delivering relevant continuing education.

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2 CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses, *A Year of Growth and Success*, 7.

3 Novotny, “Internationally Educated Nurses on the Frontlines of Fighting Diabetes.”

4 Struchkov, “An Internationally Educated Nurse Shares His Journey to a New Career in Canada.”

5 Ibid.
CARE Centre leaders have focused on organizational effectiveness by keeping a close eye on financial management and strategic planning. A move to securing charitable status has allowed the organization to pursue additional sources of revenue and corporate partners. Centre leaders have adopted a forward-thinking approach in developing their plans and priorities—anticipating communities where they could and should be involved. For example, the organization recently expanded operations to the Peel Region, where the communities of Mississauga and Brampton are home to over 93 different ethnic groups and 60 languages.6

Finally, CARE Centre is focused on creating an interactive community for its members by involving them in its governance and operations. It offers activities and opportunities for alumni, including continuing education, mentorship of new IENs, and, for some, joining CARE Centre as a board member. An engaged and active membership creates opportunities for sharing experiences and knowledge, which in turn helps strengthen the programs and services the organization offers. CARE Centre alumni have helped open doors to employment for other IENs by identifying opportunities and providing references.

CHALLENGES

CARE Centre has encountered a number of challenges as it has grown and expanded. As an organization, the Centre needs to demonstrate expertise in a number of cross-cutting areas: nursing, education, health care, immigration policy, newcomer settlement, and employment. Leaders must be continually mindful of the changing immigration environment and the economic forces that directly impact nursing employment opportunities in Ontario. They also have to be well informed about the nursing regulatory environment and changes on the horizon. And they have to be current on best practices in adult and continuing education, including the use of technology as a delivery tool. Maintaining expertise in all of these fields takes considerable effort and resources.

The observational job-shadowing opportunities offered are a popular and successful component of the organization’s programming. Securing an appropriate number of job placements in a variety of health care and nursing sectors is a challenge that management must consistently address. Health care partners have many priorities, including placements for students from Canadian nursing schools. CARE Centre has brokered reasonably priced insurance coverage that members purchase in order to participate in an observational role in health care settings. This arrangement has helped create placement opportunities.

CARE Centre’s observational job shadowing arrangement is a popular and successful component for both internationally educated professionals and the health care sector.

Furthermore, IENs arriving in Ontario have not always been aware of the opportunities provided through CARE Centre. In response, CARE Centre embarked on an enhanced marketing and communications strategy in early 2011 and redesigned its website. The goal of the strategy is to build awareness of the organization and its services and develop further connections with employers. The new Joan Lesmond IEN of the Year Award recognizes the contributions of a CARE Centre member and helps build the organization’s profile.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses is a pioneer in bridging programs that has helped IENs successfully move from pre-registration to integration into Ontario workplaces. Leaders of similar organizations that seek to help internationally educated professionals (IEPs) (e.g., engineers, accountants, and other health professionals) secure Canadian registration and employment can learn from CARE Centre’s model. Key takeaways include the following:

6 Novotny, “Internationally Educated Nurses on the Frontlines of Fighting Diabetes.”
• Implement a client-centred case management approach to help IEPs navigate the complex Canadian licensing system and improve their successful integration.

• Create job-shadowing opportunities that can provide a critical learning experience in terms of the soft skills and competencies required in a typical Canadian workplace.

• Consider how employed IEPs and their workplaces could champion programs and services.

• Leverage existing technology solutions to expand the delivery of programs.

• Develop and maintain strong connections with key stakeholders in the employer, education, and regulatory communities.

• Formalize the involvement of alumni members to provide peer support and to advocate for bridging programs in workplaces and communities.

Finally, leaders with CARE Centre are considering how to engage in more upstream work so that nurses in other countries who are thinking of coming to Canada are better informed and prepared to meet the language and communication requirements needed for Canadian registration and workplace success. Two such initiatives are in development: a series of multilingual outreach videos to be posted on YouTube; and collaboration with the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program—a pilot project to assist immigrants under the Federal Skilled Worker Program prepare for employment in Canada while they are still in their country of origin completing the final requirements for their immigration.7

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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ABOUT THE LEADERS’ ROUNDTABLE ON IMMIGRATION

The Leaders’ Roundtable on Immigration brings together three key stakeholder groups—business leaders and executives, government leaders and officials, and experts and practitioners—to address common issues relating to immigration.

The objective of the Roundtable is to engage leaders in developing and implementing effective strategies for attracting, integrating, and retaining immigrants in order to ensure sustainable competitiveness. Canada has moved into an era of chronic labour shortages, and immigrants are a critical source of talent for all Canadian employers. To meet their workforce needs, employers must take full advantage of immigrants’ talents to enhance organizational competitiveness and growth. The primary focus of the Roundtable will be to increase business investment in immigrants and to foster government policies and programs that support workplace initiatives.

For more information about the Roundtable, please visit: www.conferenceboard.ca/networks/lri/default.aspx.

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