

Practice #8: A Bilingual Nurse-Coordinator in a Halifax Hospital (IWK Health) (Nova Scotia)

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ABOUT THE FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is part of the *Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts* (available at: https://www.grefops.ca/directory_innovative_practices.html)

The *Directory of Innovative Practices* (formerly the Handbook of Innovative Practices on the Integration of Official Language Minority Health and Social Services) is a complementary resource to the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*¹. It presents initiatives that have been put in place, most often at the local level, that respond to a community need and are perceived as innovative by the various actors involved in their implementation. The practices were identified, analyzed and classified according to an evaluation framework developed by the Health Council of Canada. This framework allowed us to distinguish between emerging practices, promising practices and leading practices. Some of these practices were suggested by the *Société Santé en français* and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or other partners.

The reader is referred to the [Introduction and Method](#) document for information about the authors and collaborators, background on the project, a description of the methodology used to create the fact sheets, definitions of the following concepts:

- Leading Practice, Promising Practice, Emerging Practice
- Quality of evidence, impact, applicability, transferability
- Service coordination, service integration, liaison
- Active offer

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¹ The self-assessment Tool is available in English and French and can be accessed at the following Web address:
https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment_tool.html (English version)
https://www.grefops.ca/outil_autoevaluation.html (French version)

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This practice contributes to improving:

- Your organization's values and principles of: user safety;
- Your organization's resources: continuity of services among the various sectors or departments of the organization in an official language minority situation;
- Interinstitutional coordination, liaison and integration mechanisms;
- Relations with service users;
- Community resources.

The organization implementing this practice: IWK Health, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The information contained in this fact sheet was mainly acquired from a telephone interview conducted on September 8, 2017, with Renette Amirault-Laing, Bilingual Nurse Coordinator at IWK Health. It was complemented by documentary research, and these sources are cited as references. The fact sheet was revised with Mrs. Amirault-Laing on February 10, 2021.

Background

The IWK Health (named after Izaak Walton Killam, the donor's late husband) is a children's hospital established in 1909 by local Halifax, Nova Scotia physicians. Its clientele largely consists of children, teenagers, and women from the Canadian maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia).² It currently employs almost 3,200 people.

Although active offer is not yet a consistent practice, the hospital strongly encourages it. Employees who can speak French wear lapel pins that say "Bonjour". However, not all services can rely on employees able to speak French. Over thirty years ago, the Francophone community and health professionals felt a strong need to create the position of bilingual nurse-interpreter. The service having been met with great satisfaction among users, families and health professionals, it has been maintained since then. It is now a unionized position with the title: Bilingual Nurse Coordinator.

Objectives

The practice aims to increase access to French-language services at the IWK Health, by delivering direct services and by participating in service planning. The professional's role includes three components:

- Interpreting in French and supporting Francophone families who need to receive health information regarding their medical record in their own language;
- Coordinating administrative records and the translation of documents intended for Francophone users; and
- Maintaining contact with the Francophone and Acadian community.

² IWK Health, Site portal. Retrieved from : <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/corporate-home>

Features of the practice

The role of the Bilingual Nurse Coordinator comprises three components:

1. French-language interpretation: This service is provided to families who need to receive health information regarding their medical record in their own language. Support includes explanations of procedures and communication with the physician. The nurse-coordinator follows the user's path upon arrival, through treatments, and until the person's discharge. She is all at once a service coordinator, a liaison officer, and a support person, contingent on files to which she is assigned. She moves around the whole facility and is contacted by pager. She regularly visits users. She meets three to five families per day, which involves intensive follow-up, interpretation and support. Any French-speaking family admitted to IWK Health can access the services provided by the bilingual nurse-coordinator. Users are mainly Acadian individuals.
2. Coordination of administrative records and translation: The professional acts as a liaison between various services regarding French language services. She also coordinates the transmission of letters to translators so they can be translated into the user's mother tongue.
3. Maintaining contact with the Francophone and Acadian community: The nurse-coordinator is part of the *Santé en français* network, leads and participates in awareness-raising activities and is on the board of the French Services Coordination Committee of the Nova Scotia Acadian Affairs.

It is relevant to mention the existence of three private interpretation services that are available to health professionals at IWK Health: 1) Remote Interpretation Ontario-RIO Network³, 2) Access Language Services (ALS)⁴, and 3) the Insight application on iPad⁵. Healthcare professionals and families can call upon these services when the nurse-interpreter is unavailable, or if interpretation in another language is needed. The Nurse Coordinator provides training and support to IWK staff in the use of the various interpretation systems.

Challenges

Being the sole Nurse Coordinator in a hospital involves a heavy workload. The challenge lies in being both a nurse and an interpreter. While this dual role enables knowledge of medical procedure terminology and any medical record issue; it is nevertheless a very demanding function. The professional spends more time than expected carrying out interpretation tasks, which leaves little time for other roles.

³ The RIO Network (Remote Interpretation Ontario) is an interpretation service in 180 languages, available on a 24-hour/7-day basis. Retrieved from : <http://accessalliance.ca/programs-services/language-services/r-i-o-network-remote-interpretation-ontario/>

⁴ Access Language Services (ALS) is an in-person interpretation service that operates by reservation.

⁵ The IWK Health has initiated this practice one year ago and is testing its use in the emergency unit as a pilot project. The healthcare professional can access an iPad tablet, equipped with the Insight application, which is confidential and reserved for interpretation. The IWK Health is working to implement this system in other units. Retrieved from : <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/languageline-insight/id1068011382>

Analysis⁶

Why is this practice considered innovative?

This practice meets a need in the milieu. It derives from the need to ensure quality French-language services for IWK users. Telephone interpretation did not meet users' expectations; lack of visual contact was the main reason for their dissatisfaction.

The practice has been in place for more than 30 years and since it is not yet widespread it is considered innovative by the hospital's senior managers, healthcare providers, and users. It is recognized by the *Société Santé en français* networks that have an interest in initiatives that work well in linguistic minority contexts.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: Although it has been in place for more than 30 years, this initiative has not been formally evaluated. It appears to have positive impacts on user safety: based on testimonials, it is assumed to decrease diagnostic and medical errors.

Impact: Any French-speaking family admitted or going for a specialist consultation at IWK Health can access the services of the Bilingual Nurse Coordinator. However, we have no data on the number of families who actually use these services.

Applicability: This practice is implemented at IWK Health, in Nova Scotia. The initiative is well publicized within the institution and well used by the target population. There is no information available about other institutions or provinces having adopted this practice.

Transferability: Since we have no information about other hospital facilities having implemented a similar initiative, we cannot comment about its transferability.

⁶ This analysis is based on criteria defined in the *Innovative Practices Evaluation Framework* designed by the Health Council of Canada, Retrieved from: https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP_Framework_Eng_final_1.pdf and outlined in the Introduction and method document.