

# FRANCOPHONE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH GRADUATES

The Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) brings together ten college and university institutions<sup>1</sup> that represent the Francophone minority community's post-secondary education network and that play a role in training Francophone health professionals. The CNFS national secretariat provides coordination, consultation and liaison among the ten member institutions.

In 2003, the CNFS undertook Phase II of the Health Training and Research Project, which will continue into 2008. To carry out this project, the CNFS received support from Health Canada under the Action Plan for Official Languages, announced in 2003.

Phase II of the CNFS project has been developed around four complementary lines of action – recruitment, training, research and coordination – that allow intervention throughout the training process, from raising awareness of the health professions among young Francophones to continuing the education of graduates in their professional environment within the community. In a field like health, training – whether clinical or practical – is essential and is the central line of action that the three other lines support and reinforce.

The CNFS has recently designed two special projects devoted to the retraining and professional integration of Francophone internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs). It is therefore developing health retraining programs to meet the specific needs of Francophone immigrants who are living in a minority community and are health graduates. The CNFS is also developing tools to support teachers and staff of educational institutions that deal with Francophone IEHPs. Finally, the CNFS is also working to advance research in this area.

## Francophone IEHPs

Many of the people who come to Canada every year possess health qualifications. These immigrants represent a tremendous asset to Canadian society, but professional difficulties and barriers prevent many of them from practicing in their field. Nonetheless, efforts are being made to facilitate recognition of their qualifications while guaranteeing quality of service. Several national and provincial organizations are running projects designed to speed up credential recognition, but few of them deal with the specific needs of Francophone IEHPs, and they are rarely conducted in French.

Canada has a shortage of Francophone professionals and human resources in the critical area of health care. Recruiting, integrating and retaining Francophone IEHPs is therefore crucial for Canadian society as a whole, and particularly for Francophone minority communities who wish to increase access to French language health services.

In November 2003, Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee published the *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities* (CIC 2003). The Committee proposed significant efforts to ensure better integration and retention of French-speaking immigrants in Francophone minority communities. It also adopted a strategic plan to increase and more effectively coordinate the efforts to achieve the five objectives set out in the Strategic Framework.

The Strategic Framework covers the period from 2006 to 2011 and sets out three key guidelines, including the recognition of internationally educated workers' credentials in order to foster employability. The Committee suggests that the health sector be given priority, through large-scale projects. It also recommends that French language post-secondary educational institutions receive support for their efforts to recruit and integrate international students by offering them academic and social guidance services. In addition, the Committee stresses the importance of planning and offering training and internships to upgrade professional competencies and employment-related skills. Finally, the Committee plans to establish language training in English or French for Francophone immigrants.

In November 2005, the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM) did an exploratory study for the CNFS. In 2006, it published its results in a report entitled *La reconnaissance des diplômés internationaux francophones en santé au Canada : un potentiel pour les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire* (Lafontant et al. 2005). The CIRLM noted a lack

of data on the particular circumstances of Francophone immigrants who have competencies in the health field and who want to enter the labour market outside Quebec.

To carry out its study, the CIRLM conducted interviews and held meetings with 38 Francophone international health graduates (IHGs), 11 employment agencies and 13 employers in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta. Based on a random sample of 3% of the 2001 Census, 79% of international graduates settled in Ontario, 12.6% in Alberta, 4.3% in Manitoba and 4% in New Brunswick. According to the estimates, the four provinces appear to have 12,531 Francophone immigrant health graduates.

The following are some of the highlights from this study.

The difficulties that IHGs experience in entering the Canadian labour market relate to recognition of degrees and work experience acquired outside Canada. The source of these difficulties is an institutional or bureaucratic approach to establishing equivalences, an approach characterized by slowness, a complex multi-level system, evaluation criteria that are not entirely fair, and problems in communicating information because of a lack of clarity or promptness. The process is further complicated by the fact that in Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta, it is conducted in English.

A second type of difficulty arises from the fact that training or upgrading is insufficient, especially in French. Newcomers are asked to do their training again and not only is this unnecessary training costly, but it can take the place of other types of training that would prove more useful or necessary, in areas such as technical skills, language and work environment (vertical and horizontal relationships, relationships with the clientele). For IHGs as well, this upgrading is expensive. Finally, the particular characteristics of the Canadian work environment in the health field may also cause problems of integration.

The interviews conducted with IHGs have revealed that, in their efforts to obtain work where they can apply their training before coming to Canada, they rely primarily on their own talents and determination. They are inclined to prepare themselves better by taking professional courses, passing examinations and acquiring Canadian work experience. Their assets of professionalism, openness and good horizontal and vertical communications also help them to retain employment. However, they also rely considerably on the Canadian authorities to make a fair, consistent evaluation of their foreign credentials and to provide focused, effective retraining that will avoid unnecessary costs to them and to the state.

According to the placement agencies that took part in the interviews, qualifications, in particular those that

are transferable, networking, Canadian training and personal qualities are the factors that help IHGs find employment in their field. Where IHGs are unsuccessful in securing such employment, the most important solutions to consider are retraining courses and language learning, especially of English. The agencies also suggest some other solutions, such as streamlining accreditation procedures, better dissemination of information, financial assistance for training and options for alternative employment in a related field.

This study has shown the inadequacy of French-language training or upgrading available to meet the specific needs of Francophone immigrants with training in the health field. It revealed that the process of establishing equivalences and accreditation often takes place in English, which is detrimental to Francophone minority communities. Lack of proficiency in English is a major obstacle for

Francophone IEHPs. Several types of retraining exist and are available in Canada's English-language educational institutions, but there is little in the way of training or programs designed for Francophone IEHPs.

It is in this context that the CNFS is trying to fill the gaps identified in the study, in order to foster the employability of Francophone IEHPs and to facilitate accreditation of their qualifications so that they can find their rightful place in Francophone minority communities.

CNFS projects that meet the needs of Francophone IEHPs

The CNFS launched its major initiative in this area in February 2007, thanks to the financial support of Health Canada's Internationally Educated Health Professionals Initiative. This project in support of training Francophone IEHPs involves priority initiatives that will facilitate the accreditation and integration of Francophone immigrants with

professional competencies in the health field. It will be carried out over four years (from February 1, 2007 to March 31, 2010).

Several components of the CNFS's Francophone IEHPs training initiative are of particular interest to official language minority communities. It also calls upon the many government departments and agencies whose mandates include immigration and training, regulation and evaluation in the health field. The CNFS wants to engage them in partnership and collaboration to carry out its project.

The CNFS's Francophone IEHPs training initiative has four objectives:

- To design and promote, through a Web site, intercultural training for stakeholders involved in retraining Francophone (IEHPs). The targeted professions are medicine, nursing science and practical nursing, occupational therapy and physiotherapy;

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- To develop French language methodological and practical training in nursing science and in practical nursing, in order to prepare candidates to take regulators' examinations in various provinces;
- To hold three regional meetings in early 2008 to examine obstacles associated with the supply of French language services for evaluating degrees and competencies, in order to identify solutions and to increase the provision of these French language services;
- To engage in consultation, provide liaison, create partnerships and promote the project and the training that is developed.

The Francophone IEHP training project thus enables the CNFS to design and deliver retraining and educational tools to meet the needs of these health professionals. However, the project can only be carried out with the support of regulators, professional associations and networks of international graduates.

A second CNFS project will start in early 2008.<sup>2</sup> This project, called L'intégration professionnelle des diplômés internationaux francophones en santé dans les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire, will examine the factors involved in the professional integration of Francophone IHGs in the four target provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick). This project is designed to increase the number of Francophone IHGs practicing as Francophone health professionals in Francophone minority communities. The project will take the form of action research in both rural and urban environments and will be carried out in partnership with

organizations that provide assistance to immigrants, and in particular, the network of regional coordinators of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, training institutions, employers and regulators.

Thanks to its national network of post-secondary health education institutions, the CNFS is developing partnerships with a large number of organizations that are complementary to theirs or that are active in this field. Because of its positive record in conducting health training and research in French, this national organization is ideally suited to coordinate and advance the cause of Francophone IHGs.

#### References

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Université Sainte-Anne, Université de Moncton, Quebec-New Brunswick agreement, Nouveau-Brunswick Community College in Campbellton, University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean, Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, Laurentian University, Collège Boréal, University of Ottawa, and La Cité collégiale.

<sup>2</sup> Project submitted to Human Resources and Social Development Canada; final approval pending. The project will run for three years (2008-2011).



## Integration of Newcomers

**Integration of Newcomers: International Approaches**

The Winter 2006 edition of *Canadian Diversity / Diversité canadienne* provides a comparative perspective on international approaches to the integration of newcomers.

The issue includes profiles of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the European Union, Finland, France, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. There are also thematic articles on civic discourse, challenges to integration, the "second-generation," and a debate on the Danish cartoon controversy.

This issue is the latest in a series of international comparisons on migration and diversity topics. Past issues looked at National Identity and Diversity, International Approaches to Pluralism, and Negotiating Religious Pluralism.

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