

## **Completing the Circle: End of Life Care with Aboriginal Families**

This CIHR-funded pilot project puts into action recommendations made in the literature for cross-cultural end of life health care. Results of our previous research supported by a developmental grant from the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation consistently suggest that services based on palliative care philosophy are underutilized by ethnic minority patients due to cultural barriers. These findings corroborated our focus group results and suggested that one culture is in particular need of these services: Aboriginal families in Canada. Based on these preliminary findings, this project pursued the following research objectives.

### **Research Objectives:**

- (1) Enhance health care professionals' awareness of end of life health care needs of Aboriginal families.
- (2) Increase awareness of available end of life care services for Aboriginal families.
- (3) Increase access to palliative care services by Aboriginal individuals and families.

### **Research Activities:**

- (1) To achieve research objective one, the research team developed curriculum that can be delivered to health care providers within the bounded context of our Health District. This curriculum will include information about culturally sensitive and appropriate protocol for Aboriginal families. Curriculum consists of a video ("Completing the Circle: End of Life Care with Aboriginal Families"), PowerPoint presentation, and lecture material. Fact sheets describing key messages about appropriate cultural protocol when delivering end of life care to Aboriginal families will be distributed to those who attend presentations as well as widely distributed to health care and service providers in hospitals and community agencies.
- (2) To achieve research objective two, fact sheets of available services have been prepared for easy distribution to Aboriginal individuals, families, and service providers. They will be culturally sensitive and provide relevant and easily accessible information. Fact sheets will be provincially and nationally relevant. In addition, a video containing messages from elders to Aboriginal families has been produced ("Completing the Circle: Healing Message About End of Life Spoken to Aboriginal Families").
- (3) Our long-term goal is to increase delivery of culturally sensitive palliative and end of life care service, increase awareness of services, and thereby increase utilization by Aboriginal families. Our pilot project is a step toward this goal.

### **Research Plan:**

The Community Action Research methodology described by Senge & Scharmer (2001) organizes our research plan. We have established a strong network of collaborators in our Health District comprising: hospital based Palliative Care Services and Native Health Services; Elders and members of the Aboriginal community; numerous community-

based service agencies. This community and hospital based network has collaborated with university researchers in developing the research and will continue to act as research partners in an iterative process of designing curriculum, video, and fact sheets. The conceptual theoretical framework used in this research is a cross-cultural palliative model, a concept that has recently been articulated in the literature (Nyatanga, 2002; O'Neil, 1994). Results of this pilot project will provide action-oriented products that will bring greater cultural awareness to the delivery of palliative and end of life health care. Increasing cultural sensitivity around end of life health care may prove to be a positive change for non-Aboriginal families as well. We also contribute to a knowledge base describing Aboriginal end of life medicine and healing in contemporary context.