

The Yukon Quest: An Adventure in Wound-care De

BY Judy Dabbs,
Heather Orsted AND
Shannon McGrath

While professional development in wound care is a challenge faced by every region of the country, practitioners in the North have greater obstacles to overcome. Distance, low population density and a paucity of specialized services and resources are constant barriers in the quest for improving wound-care practice. In February 2004, a first important step was made in narrowing the gap to access to educational opportunities in one area of the North.

Judy's Story

Our dream in the Yukon Territories has been to develop an evidence-based, interdisciplinary, territory-wide wound-care guideline. How to get there is the question. Our geography itself creates challenges.

There are 483,450 square kilometres in the Yukon, with a total population of almost 30,000. Whitehorse, the capital city, is home to 22,131, with the remaining people living in and around 16 smaller communities spread



The Yukon Wound-care Planning Team

throughout the territories.

There has been keen interest in improving our wound-care practice, but we will have to do it differently from the "outside."

We do not have local access to resources such as wound-care specialists/clinics, vascular testing/vascular specialists, foot-care specialists, etc. For these services, we have to fly south to Vancouver, Edmonton or Calgary.

We knew a wound-care course in Whitehorse would expose more health-care professionals to the scope of this field and that having a common background and current information would move us closer to developing our guidelines.

Heather's Story

Judy Dabbs, a University of Toronto (International Interdisciplinary Wound Care Course) graduate had wanted the CAWC Seminar Series to come to Whitehorse, but to bring the program there for a potential 50 registrants was a bit challenging. So Judy and I planned for a local program tailored to their needs. A detailed conversation occurred between Judy and me to determine what the needs of her group were so

that the two-day workshop would ultimately improve patient-care outcomes. Since group members were from various disciplines, we added a skilled wound-care occupational therapist as part of the faculty. Two interactive, educational days were planned that had parallels to the Seminar Series, with the addition of an ostomy-management session.

The flight north from Vancouver didn't take as long as we expected, and we soon were flying over the

river valley of Whitehorse in the Yukon Territories. When we arrived, Whitehorse was preparing for one of the most challenging races the North (or anywhere) has to offer—the Yukon Quest. Mushers and their dogs raced 1,600 kilometres from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Whitehorse in a challenge to see who could cross the finish line first. The excitement in the city was palpable.

I felt a similar excitement when the over 100 registrants attending the two-day workshop arrived;

velopment in Canada's North

the learning, sharing and team building had begun. Wound-care leaders were identified and became involved in the sessions. Most importantly, connections were made between the different

regions of the Yukon in an attempt to support an ongoing regional dialogue for best practice in wound care.

An interactive workshop



Shannon's Story

When I was contacted to be part of this exciting educational venture, I jumped at the chance. The city was buzzing with the excitement of the upcoming Yukon Quest, and I was pleased to see that this energy was transferred to the registrants at the session. Coming from a reha-

bilitation background, I am always interested to see the number of rehabilitation professionals interested or practising in wound care. I was certainly impressed by the Yukon group.

Being from Calgary, I, like the general public, have often heard of the restricted resources and dearth of professionals in the North.

However, my participation in the workshop showed me that a multidisciplinary approach to wound care, which can help to lessen the impact of the restrictions, is alive and strong in the Yukon. The participants not only included nurses and a physician but also included rehabilitation attendants such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and chiropodists. Their level of skill and knowledge was impressive as was their continued desire for learning to improve their practice.

The feedback from participants about the workshop revealed that one of the most valuable learning opportunities was meeting other professionals practising in wound care. Fortunately, our educational approach not only offered information but also identified other professional leaders who could be used as ongoing resources in their community.

Health-care professionals travelled from all over the territories to

Judy Dabbs, RN, is a specialist in nursing in remote areas of the North, having completed the Outpost and Community Health Nursing Diploma at Dalhousie University and spending years working in the NWT, Yukon and northern Newfoundland. She has taught in the Outpost program, completed a graduate program in psychiatric nursing, and attended the IIWCC. She has been working in home care in Whitehorse, Yukon, since 1991.

Heather Orsted, RN, BN, ET, is currently the Chair of the CAWC Education Committee. She is a co-director of the University of Toronto's International Interdisciplinary Wound Care Course and has made major contributions to wound-care education nationally and internationally.

Shannon McGrath, OT, is currently practising in Ottawa, Ontario, in private practice. She has been a facilitator for the CAWC Skills Labs in Vancouver, British Columbia, and an expert panelist for the CAWC conference in Toronto, Ontario.

Tips for Ongoing Regional Wound-care Development:

1. Involve regional wound-care leaders from all disciplines and all areas of practice.
2. Identify strengths and weaknesses of current wound-care practice.
3. Develop a strategy for wound-care practice improvements.
4. Meet with regional management/administration to set realistic goals based on available resources and funding.
5. Develop educational initiatives based on regional needs and resources, adult learning principles and best practice.
6. Involve regional wound-care leaders to encourage precepting and support at the clinical level.
7. Evaluate the impact of your plan.
8. Identify strengths and weaknesses.

attend this two-day course, and they left with not only a wealth of information but also, more importantly, a wealth of peer support in advancing practice in wound care.

Impact of the Workshop on Practice, from Judy

The workshop surpassed the participant's expectations. It was both entertaining and informative at the same time. People still talk in glowing terms about the presentations.

As a result of the success of our first major educational endeavour, we decided to hold our first-ever Wound Care

Conference in Whitehorse, September 9–11, 2004, bringing even more experts to the North.

From these beginnings, we can now move on to our goal of providing consistent wound care across the Yukon.

Epilogue, from Heather

The morning after the hands-on workshop, I woke early at 6:00 a.m. with anticipation. I was hoping I had not missed the first team to cross the finish line in the Yukon Quest. I turned on the TV to the station that ran the news and that provided a camera link to downtown. I heard



Weary but triumphant, the first team across the finish line of the Yukon Quest rests after the race.

they were waiting for the glow of the musher's head torch to break through the night.

So, with me in my city clothes (looking terribly underdressed) and Shannon in her parka, toque

and boots (looking like a northern explorer), we were off!

To see what the winning dogs looked like after their ordeal made us weep; they had weathered 1,600 kilometers of both the American and Canadian North, but they had done it "as a team" and they had won the Yukon Quest.

The parallels seem so strong: a northern team with a passion and a quest, working toward a common goal. Yet, it seems nothing worth obtaining is gained easily. But with determination and perseverance, wound care in the Yukon will be best practice. ☺

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A photograph of a group of diverse healthcare professionals standing together. They include a chef, a nurse, a doctor, and several other medical staff members, all smiling and looking towards the camera.