



Extending MUN Med Gateway's reach: Community projects to promote wellness

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Purpose: Newfoundland and Labrador receives refugees from countries where conflict, political instability, disaster and trauma have been part of their migration story. This presentation describes how community engagement and student volunteer programs can align with health professional practices to support improved social well-being for refugees. The MUN Med Gateway project has supported access to Primary Care for refugees in St. John's since 2006. As a service learning opportunity pre-clerkship medical students participate in collecting medical histories from recently arrived newcomers and connecting them to family doctors in the community. The importance of socialization to health and wellbeing is well documented. As Lamba and Krahn note, refugees often lack the financial, social and human capital available to other immigrant groups and are more dependent on local support networks (2003: 336). Refugees often arrive in St. John's in small numbers, leaving them without a "reference group or 'community' to connect them to the people, jobs, and resources" (Hyndman 2011: 27). **Methods:** MUN Med Gateway has partnered with local agencies to provide additional support to newcomers to St. John's. These include cooking projects with both men and women in collaboration with the Association for New Canadians Women's Group and Bridges to Hope. There is also a medical student led youth activities group that encourages physical activity and socialization. All these activities have been student initiated and community driven. The Association for New Canadians Women's Group and Men's Group identified needs for increased social opportunities for women, men and youth. Different opportunities were designed for each group and partner organizations were sought to provide resources and suitable, well equipped locations for the activities such as kitchens and sports venues. **Results:** Through MUN Med Gateway initiatives students gain opportunities to develop and appreciate community partnerships; gain a deeper understanding of the challenges newcomers face; and participate in a service learning opportunity focused on social determinants of health. Refugee participants gain opportunities to socialize with others in the community; share cooking traditions; and develop stronger ties to community groups. **Conclusion:** MUN Med Gateway provides

an opportunity for medical students to respond to needs identified within the refugee community and to develop partnerships that are creative and fulfilling.