Learning about public health: supporting community education goals through a photovoice and knowledge exchange project

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Introduction

- *Helicobacter pylori* is a bacterium known to cause gastritis, peptic ulcers, and stomach cancer.
- To address community concerns about the high prevalence of *H. pylori* infection in northern Canadian Indigenous communities, the Canadian North *Helicobacter pylori* (CANHelp) Working Group’s community projects bring together community members, academic researchers, and healthcare providers to conduct research focused on goals identified by community representatives.

- Priorities of this collaboration include:
  - building knowledge within the community about public health topics and research methods, particularly amongst the youth.
  - knowledge exchange between community members and academic researchers to support the meaningful movement of knowledge generated through the research into implementation by users such as community members and healthcare providers.

- In one participating community (Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories), community representatives and academic researchers developed a project that supports public health learning goals.
- The academic partners traveled to Fort McPherson to work with community partners (junior high and high school students) in a photovoice project aimed at exploring youth’s understandings of community concerns about the impact of *H. pylori* infection upon the lives of local residents.

- In Fall 2016, community partners (three youth and a chaperone) will travel to Edmonton to:
  - share their work and to learn about research activities conducted at the University of Alberta
  - visit other post-secondary institutions in the city
  - shadow physicians working in Edmonton clinics

- Upon returning to Fort McPherson, they will present what they learned to other community members.

Significance and Implications:

- Through these photovoice and knowledge exchange initiatives:
  - academic partners have opportunities to learn about community knowledge and information dynamics.
  - community partners have opportunities to learn about various public health topics and academic research methods.

- By participating in academic research activities in their community and through hands-on experiences at the university, community partners are able to learn about a variety of methods used in public health research settings.

- These initiatives, nested in a collaborative community-driven research program, foster public health learning opportunities identified as priorities by northern community leaders.

In their own words:

**Academic partners**

A flexible approach to research design that incorporates learning from one another and allows for the scope of the project to evolve in response to priorities identified by different collaborators, while perhaps unconventional, has proven invaluable. The students largely determined the focus and knowledge generated through the photovoice project is strengthened through the openness and mutual respect knowledge exchange approaches such as these demonstrate. Knowing that we are working together to find solutions to public health problems is a great feeling.  

Amy Colquhoun, PhD student, School of Public Health

**Community partners**

I am hoping that they will be able to understand *H. pylori* and answer questions for people in the community. I’m so excited for them, because this is going to help them in so many ways, even with their schooling.

Jayda Andre, Edmonton trip chaperone

The only reason I went on this trip is because I wanted to know what *H. pylori* is and talk to people and find out if my uncle had it or not. I didn’t know about it. Never had a chance to ask her, so I wanted to know and get together and learn about it first-hand.

Jayda Andre, Student at Chief Julius School

Bringing us people together is important. You guys are here and we are here. All learning together and getting closer to each other.

Learning about something in a group and as a family. If not for this group I would have never had the opportunity to tour NAIT, MacEwan and see the trades and programs they have. I am interested in a career in health, so I am looking forward to learning about that. I don’t know for sure what I want to do, so I am hoping to get some ideas about that while I’m here too.

Jayda Andre, Student at Chief Julius School

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Amy Colquhoun, PhD student, School of Public Health

**Context**

- In one participating community (Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories), community partners (junior high and high school students) in a photovoice project aimed at exploring youth’s understandings of community concerns about the impact of *H. pylori* infection upon the lives of local residents.

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www.canhelpworkinggroup.ca