



'Leveling Up' Health-Care Providers to Respond to COVID-19

Creating COVID-19 Training in B.C.

With the support of British Columbians...

in following the guidelines set out by the provincial health officer, and with the efforts of thousands of incredible health-care workers throughout the province who stepped up in a crisis, B.C. continues its work to bend the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Province has put a variety of measures in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; beds were cleared to allow for a potential influx of COVID-19 patients in acute care areas, non-urgent scheduled surgeries were temporarily put on hold, and many health-care staff needed to receive special training quickly in order to be ready for the potential "significant wave" of new cases.

"There was no lack of nurses willing to step into those roles and provide that greater level of care response."

Joanne Maclaren, senior director of the Ministry of Health's Nursing Policy Secretariat



Screenshot from one of the online learning modules for the FEPA online training program, portraying a simulation of the treatment for a patient with a severe case of COVID-19

When COVID-19 began to gain momentum in the province in mid-March 2020, the Ministry of Health's Health Sector Workforce and Beneficiary Services Division was tasked with preparing for the potential of a major influx of patients requiring critical care, or "surge capacity." At this time, the Province requested all health regulators to begin emergency registration of non-practicing or retired health-care professionals, including professionals from other jurisdictions and the armed forces.

As well, there was a need identified for specialized training in critical care (such as the use of ventilators, recognizing intense shock, and the monitoring of specific vitals like oxygen supply/demand and comprehensive patient assessments in critical situations) for many health-care professionals.



From conception to implementation in 10 Days or less

On March 23rd, Joanne Maclaren, senior director of the ministry's Nursing Policy Secretariat, reached out to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training (AEST) and the B.C. Institute of Technology (BCIT) to develop a program to "rapidly," yet safely, concentrate the learning that was required. With the influx of COVID-19 patients there was a growing need for health-care professionals to become familiar with the level of advanced and critical care required to treat those with more serious cases.

Normally, putting together learning modules like this for health-care professionals takes months. With support from the ministry and AEST, BCIT was able to develop a self-directed online program, the Focused Education Preparation Advancing Frontline Registered Nurses (FEPA). This course allows front-line registered nurses as well as other health-care professionals in B.C. to "level up" their knowledge to better support a "potential hospital acute overflow from COVID-19."



On April 2nd, just 10 days after Joanne's initial inquiry to her colleagues, the first module of the program was launched online and made available to health-care professionals around the province. By working with the Provincial Nursing and Allied Health Council (formerly the Chief Nursing Officer's Council), nurses and other health-care professionals were identified as being ideal for the program.

There was never a need to make the training mandatory, as Joanne notes, "There was no lack of nurses willing to step into those roles and provide that greater level of care response."

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry was meeting daily with the Provincial Nursing and Allied Health Council regarding their needs for the program as well as other priorities to support the pandemic response. The ministry provided an overview of the planned modules and timing of release and met regularly with health authority operations leaders to make them aware that this new COVID-19 specific training was coming. This allowed them to consider both how they would identify learners for the program and who they would recommend take it. This resulted in many health authorities developing their own internal communications plans to spread the news, which ensured a large and steady pool of those interested in the training.

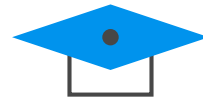
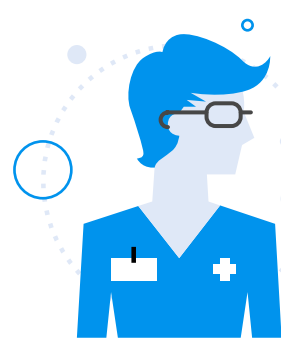
What has this meant for health-care practitioners in B.C.?

By December 9th, there were 11,000 learners enrolled in the program with a 90% completion rate. Most learners are from B.C., but the program also draws learners from other provinces and the United States as well. The program's online delivery system, using the most recent COVID-19 information and complete virtual critical care simulations, has made it ideal for those in rural and remote areas of the province.

The administrators of FEPA eventually realized that it was not just nurses who were taking the course. Other health-care providers like respiratory therapists and physicians were also taking the course to refresh their knowledge on critical care.

"The BCIT FEPA program has been widely used with over 11,500 learners having accessed the course to prepare them for the complex health-care

environments due to COVID-19," says Kathy Kennedy, Associate Dean of the BC Institute of Technology. "The program has been a great success with overwhelmingly positive feedback from both learners and our industry partners. This was a great opportunity for BCIT specialty nursing to provide just in time knowledge and skills to support our fellow frontline health-care members in a team-based approach during the pandemic."



Where to next?

The program has been so successful that BCIT is now working on how to recognize online course completion for those health-care professionals who would like to continue the specialized pathway to becoming "fully credentialed" in critical care.

This training has prepared thousands of nurses and health-care professionals to respond to the needs of patients in acute care in the province requiring a higher level of care as a result of COVID-19. Similarly, as the health-care community learns more about COVID-19, its symptoms, and its effects, these health-care clinicians will be better prepared to respond to the subtle and often sudden changes in a person's health condition that may occur. A patient might enter the hospital with strong oxygen levels and be able to easily carry on a conversation with their nurse, only to be experiencing severe shortness of breath hours later. Patients can feel reassurance that their nurses and other health-care team members have the knowledge, skills and

abilities to provide safe, competent care and are better equipped to minimize complications they may experience.

Adds Joanne, "With COVID-19...there's an unpredictability to the virus, so being able to be aware of and recognize those subtle cues and critical details in an emergency room/critical care environment, could really save a person's life."

"Responding to this emerging need in an expedited and collaborative way has been very positive," continues Joanne. "The FEPA program has enabled us to be more prepared in the event that we have a surge of patients requiring a higher level of care."

For more detailed information on the FEPA course created in response to COVID-19, visit [FEPA - Focused Education Preparation Advancing Frontline RNs](#).