



National Aboriginal Health Organization



Populations in Transition: Health of Circumpolar Peoples University of Toronto February 27, 2004, 2004

In September 2003, the International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH) held a major conference on the health of circumpolar peoples in Nuuk, Greenland. At the International Congress on Circumpolar Health, Kue Young from the University of Toronto proposed a one-day symposium on circumpolar health to be held in Canada. On February 27, 2004, the University of Toronto hosted this symposium, titled *Populations in Transition: Health of Circumpolar Peoples*.

Approximately 100 people were in attendance. As an elected member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health, Ajunnginiq Centre Policy Analyst Mark Buell attended on behalf of the National Aboriginal Health Organization.

A wide variety of presentations were given at the symposium. Topics included dietary changes, mental health, environmental contaminants, and the impact of a changing economy. One of the most interesting presentations was by Andrew Kozlov and Ekaterina Grigurko from the International University of Ecological and Political Sciences in Moscow, Russia on a multi-year study on the impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the dietary patterns of the indigenous peoples of Chukotka.

Findings showed that after the economic collapse of the region, people began to harvest more country foods as the only available food source. However, as it has been many decades since country foods were consumed, there is little knowledge of harvesting techniques. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a dramatic increase in deaths and injuries due to hunting and fishing accidents. Furthermore, because of the massive environmental degradation present in Siberia, the foods harvested have high levels of contaminants in them.

The participation of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), specifically the Ajunnginiq Centre, at this event was important. One of NAHO's five objects is to facilitate research and research partnerships. To accomplish this, it is important that staff are aware of research presently being conducted, and to know the researchers and their areas of interest. A report on the symposium is expected soon.

Prepared by Mark Buell