

Chapter 1

A Case Study in Micro– Learning and Alternate Credentials Before Their Time: Cardiac Care on the Web

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the journey of how the Cardiac Care on the Web online program came to be will be described, along with how the guiding principles framing the program development and delivery, as applied more than 20 years ago, still hold relevance today. Furthermore, how the program's micro-credential status has been sustained and has paved the way for micro-certifications at Laurentian University today will be discussed. Finally, this case study offers the authors the chance to review past and present literature and to reflect on next steps for Cardiac Care on the Web given the present emergence of micro-credentials in digital format.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the *Cardiac Care on the Web* program began as an Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) funded education and research project at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. The purpose of the project was two-fold: to adapt

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existing materials in cardiac nursing for internet-based delivery and to assess the nurse-participants' experiences in the online learning environment over two course offerings. Since its first delivery experience in June 2000, the project has responded to the needs of nurses from British Columbia to Newfoundland, Canada.

Because of feedback provided by the nurse-participants over the initial years of the project, an ongoing quality assurance strategy, and a sustained need for cardiac nursing education, these online courses continue to be offered today in 2021 in the format of a micro-credential program entitled *Cardiac Care on the Web*. To the authors' knowledge, this is a one-of-a kind online program available both in English and in French. The program consists of twelve one-credit courses available to all registered nurses working or interested in working in the cardiovascular field in Canada. In addition, these courses provide the student-learner with an opportunity to acquire university-level credits, which can, with permission, be used within several Canadian BScN programs. Alternatively, a nurse may choose to pursue this program for personal and/or professional development reasons. Rewards for this latter kind of study include recognition by the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) that these courses are an excellent means of preparing for the cardiac certification exam. Importantly, the different courses reflect the competencies of cardiac nursing as prescribed by CNA. To acknowledge the knowledge and skills acquired by the learners who take *Cardiac Care on the Web*, Laurentian University issues a *Statement of Professional Learning (SPL)* to nurses who successfully complete six courses of study, with the potential of earning two such credentials for the twelve courses in the program.

In many ways, the *Cardiac Care on the Web* program is an early forerunner of micro-based learning, while the *Statement of Professional Learning* is a precursor of today's evolving field of micro-credentials. The fact that the program was designed for a completely online delivery in 2000 underscores its avant-garde nature. Why did this program work as originally designed? Why does it continue to work and hold relevance today? Simply put, it was and continues to be a successful learning model because it addresses the very specific learning needs of a discrete group of professional learners. It also involves establishing and nurturing relationships among learners, an educational institution, and an employer who, in this case, needs registered nurses with specialized knowledge and skills.

BACKGROUND

Laurentian University is a bilingual (English and French) and tricultural (English, French, and Indigenous) university in the city of Greater Sudbury located in northeastern Ontario, Canada. Because northern Ontario is characterized by great

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