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**Chair**

**The Honourable Andrew Telegdi**

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## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, April 7, 2005

• (1325)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)):** We're reconvening our hearings once again.

I'd like to welcome you. We'll have five-minute presentations, after which we'll go to questions, hopefully. My challenge is always to try to get all the members who want to ask questions in, so if we have short questions and short replies, we might even get a second round.

I would like to ask Lucenia Ortiz to please start her presentation.

**Ms. Lucenia Ortiz (Co-Executive Director, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op):** Thank you very much, and good afternoon to the committee and all our guests here. This is a joint presentation of the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op and the Multicultural Coalition for Equity in Health. Both organizations are based in Edmonton.

I will start this presentation by stating that the non-recognition of foreign-trained credentials remains the most significant barrier to attaining economic well-being of immigrants. It is costing the Canadian economy up to \$2.4 billion annually in the underutilization of skills of immigrants. I'm going to focus on three very specific problems, to have more time around what we would like to suggest in terms of solutions.

The three key issues we see around problems with obtaining professional licensure and trade credentials are the lack of or limited information on the process of obtaining licensure and trade credentials for specific professions, the limited support offered to immigrants seeking licensure, and the ambiguous accreditation process across provinces.

The Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op and the Multicultural Coalition for Equity in Health have identified three key areas where the accreditation of foreign credentials could be addressed.

First is the development of national educational and occupational standards for accreditation of international education and training. The federal government needs to intervene in the unequal and inconsistent provincial accreditation standards in both the regulated and unregulated professions. The key areas of concern are reducing wait times for licensure, alternate methods for increasing accuracy in credential assessment, and developing meaningful and authentic Canadian equivalency of foreign education.

The second area is developing and implementing a profession-specific bridging and harmonization program for foreign-trained

professionals. Citizenship and Immigration should work with provincial bodies such as the ministries of education, post-secondary institutions, and licensing bodies to develop comprehensive 10- to 12-month academic programs that would prepare immigrant professionals for licensure and employment. This would include refresher courses in specific technical aspects of the profession, Canadian workplace orientation, and ESL for specific professions, supplemented by an observership/internship or a placement program in the work field.

It is also suggested that this program be delivered by the appropriate academic or educational institutions, because they have the technical capacities and facilities in place. It would also ensure that comparable advantages enjoyed by Canadian-educated graduates were available to recent newcomers. These programs should be made available at the least cost to the participants through bursaries, scholarships, or student loans.

Third, the federal government should offer incentives in the business sector to establish a hire-a-newcomer program and hire immigrant newcomers for a limited period, similar to a hire-a-student program, to acquire Canadian experience. Incentives could range from tax breaks according to the number of newcomer employers, salary subsidies, or awards of excellence.

The costs involved in implementing the recommended process include development costs in stakeholder participation in program design, program delivery costs relating to the provision of bursaries and scholarships, and low interest on student loans. For example, in the nursing refresher course delivered in one of the educational institutions in Edmonton, it would cost around \$3,000 per student for a 10-month course that would prepare them for nursing licensure.

Tessie will speak a bit more around the nursing licensure programs, which have been quite successful in fast-tracking foreign nurses into the nursing field. She's had a lot of experience working with Grant MacEwan College in their nursing program.

The refresher courses offered for the nursing profession, engineering technicians, and accountants are examples of professional-specific bridging programs delivered by post-secondary institutions that have demonstrated success in helping immigrant professionals gain employment in their field. The limited success of this program is due to its unaffordable cost and limited spaces.

Last, we would like to emphasize that the success of immigrant professionals and workers in Canada starts from the originating country of the immigrant's application. There is a need to review the principles that guide the immigration application process. When Canada accepts new immigrants, it assumes the responsibility for guaranteeing economic well-being by providing adequate and suitable employment in the field on which the applicant has been evaluated and assessed during the application process. The government should be held accountable if it cannot provide the opportunities and support that it promised when it accepted skilled immigrants based on their education and work experience. This is what makes Canada truly a just and humanitarian country.

Thank you.

• (1330)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to go with Mr. Rahim Jaffer for the first round, and we have five minutes.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentations this afternoon. I do appreciate it. Many of the suggestions are very useful.

I want to focus on one point that you raised about the harmonizing of standards with the professional associations. I think this is an issue with which there are obviously large challenges in trying to move forward on. Although often when we do communicate with many of the professional associations, whether they be engineering or medical or others, they are usually expressing to us that they're making great progress in many of these areas in trying to facilitate the ability for newer foreign credentials to go through a process of being streamlined or accredited here in Canada.

I was wondering if you could give me your experience and some of the dealings you've had, say, here in Alberta with some of the professional organizations. Has there been progress made to some extent? Are you finding that they are working with the foreign-trained accredited people to get the process they need? Or are you finding resistance in many of those associations? Maybe you could comment on that.

**Ms. Tessie Oliva (President, Multicultural Coalition for Equity in Health, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op):** In my experience in terms of seeing what's happening right now, we have so many service providers, but the clientele—the immigrants they do serve—usually don't have an all-in-one stop that would provide them with all the requirements that are needed. They have to be directed to so many different areas. It's a very cumbersome process and it's very frustrating and it's very expensive, if you're a newcomer, because you don't know your way around and you have a lot of expenses, in terms of travel expenses, in looking for these places, and they don't have much specific information on a particular profession. That's

why for all the service providers to work in concert is a very important, critical area. They have to really work together. That is one of the biggest areas that we have solicited as information or feedback from clientele—from immigrants and refugees—who are seeking foreign accreditation of foreign credentials.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** One of the areas that obviously seem to be a problem is in the medical area. Creating those residency spaces is something that we know is a challenge for many doctors, for instance, to get the training here. We recently heard in Regina that the provincial government there is creating some spaces at the faculty of medicine specifically for these foreign-trained doctors to be able to get residencies. We've heard also from other witnesses that maybe that's something the federal government should do in cooperation with the provincial side—to be able to create these residency spots at various medical departments across the country at these universities that have medical programs.

Is this something that you think would be useful? Is this something that you're hearing from doctors here in Alberta is a challenge?

**Ms. Lucenia Ortiz:** Yes, in the medical sector, I think there are two key areas that could significantly influence the integration of foreign-trained doctors into the health care system.

One, of course, is as you said, creating specific residency positions in each province, which would accept internationally trained medical graduates. Unfortunately, even within each of the hospitals, there are a very limited number of spaces they can create specifically for international medical graduates, and part of this is, of course, their own funding for residency positions, and sometimes there is an issue of a limited number of preceptors who will work with the residency.

The other area that hasn't been addressed at this point is, as you know, the fact that all Canadian medical graduates, once they finish their four years and go for residency, apply to what we call the Canadian Resident Matching Service. This is a national service that matches medical graduates with the hospitals they apply to for residency. There are several iterations.

The first iteration, where all residency positions across Canada are open, is limited to Canadian medical graduates. That's the first, but once all of those very good positions are filled, you have the second iteration, where international medical graduates can enter. So what happens is that the international medical graduates are competing for the leftover positions. So not a lot of IMGs actually apply for those, because they know there aren't many left anyway, and even if they do, it's a highly competitive process. It actually sets up the IMGs to fail, because they don't have the advantages of the support that Canadian medical graduates have.

From our end, we're really looking at opening CARMS to all, because IMGs are residents of Canada; they have as much privilege as Canadian citizens. They've been legally approved to stay here, so why can't they compete in the first iteration? That's the first point.

The second is that for them to successfully compete in any of the iterations of CARMS, they have to be adequately prepared. Even if it's not at the same level as Canadian medical graduates have, they should at least have the same level of support, which could give them a level playing field with other Canadian medical graduates.

• (1335)

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go on to Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** My question deals with the conditions of success. If I understood you correctly, in addition to recognizing international experience and credentials, you are proposing that internships or bridging courses be provided. You would like this alternative to be explored.

[*English*]

**Mr. Patrick Iroegbu (Press Relations Officer, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op):** The question about bridges for bringing about a harmonization of foreign credentials, I think, is one of the hottest topics we have debated all along in various workshops, various interviews, and in various environments. We have had a lot of contact with immigrants in various parts of Edmonton, and when we had to be in Calgary to do some interviews and to make presentations on that.

The collective sense and feeling about that is that there will be no time when you can say foreign credentials are relevant until we form a model or system that says, if you have a university degree or a technological degree at the level of a first degree, no matter what part of the world you come from, and you find yourself immediately in Canada, we will bring all these guys together. We propose one month of training to give them a sense of harmonization, so that everybody in this category will pass through it and automatically become recognized. It would be to give them a sense of belonging, a sense of commitment to the years they have put into getting that qualification, no matter what part of the world they have it from. Having found themselves in Canada, it gives them another opportunity, another form of leverage, to improve upon their experience and that qualification, and to use them to contribute to Canada's society.

So we felt that bringing in such a model would help, not only for the degree holders—including their experience—but also for all of those who have master's degrees and PhDs in various fields.

Right now, we have what are called licensed professionals. What happens to those who are in areas that are not licensed? It would appear that these people are completely neglected—completely dumped into a space where nobody recognizes them or hears their voice.

So we're advocating that for us to feel a sense of belonging in Canadian society and to use our experience and skills to contribute, there be a harmonization program to make this bridge to let people belong and contribute.

Thank you very much.

• (1340)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

Since you mentioned that Grant MacEwan College has a successful program for nurses, I wonder if you could tell me a bit about that. One of the things we've heard is that there have been lots of pilot projects and that the time for pilot projects should be over, that we should be using the experience and putting in place more broad-ranging programs to deal with those issues.

Can you tell me if it's a pilot project or if it was project where the experience has been transferred to other institutions as well?

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** The refresher program that is offered to foreign or internationally trained graduate nurses is not a pilot program. It has been going on for quite a while here in Alberta. However, there are some problems also because of financial constraints for the individual who enters into the program, because it's very expensive. In the year 2004 it has been enhanced again to almost \$3,000. That does not even include the personal expenses of these individuals.

Knowing the situation, this is a turbulent time because of the shortage of nurses in Canada, and right now in Alberta we have over 300 internationally trained nurses who are capable of getting into the workforce. However, because of money constraints, because of the time that they're out of work to go to the training program, they are impeded from trying to engage in the nursing profession per se.

The successes that this program has really given to the poor internationally trained nurses are in three areas. First of all, they're given the opportunity for orientation into the new technology. They are given the opportunity to know about the current standards of nursing practice in Canada. And third, they're given the opportunity for mentorship, which is very good. Mentorship is one of the biggest areas that we need help in. It's very expensive in terms of following them up when they are given the opportunity to establish and practise their nursing experience.

Another problem we encounter is that even if they complete their professional programs successfully, the employers here—and I can speak loudly for Alberta—look for qualifications or experience that you have in Canada. These people are entering the nursing practice in Canada for the very first time. Although they have experience, five years, ten years, or whatever, in their nursing specialty in their own internationally trained place, they are not given the opportunity to enter here because of lack of Canadian experience. We're trying to remove the barrier to that, and we have been very successful in terms of making that known to all the stakeholders, such as the employers, as we had research that was done and funded by Health Canada and spearheaded by the Network of Immigrant Women in Alberta. The people who participated in the research program were poor undergraduate nurses who belonged to all ethnic groups. It was spearheaded by the Filipino Nurses Association in Alberta. And those were the important areas that we got from the Grant MacEwan College referral program. It gives them the opportunity for entry; however, it's the financial constraint that is not really giving them the full-blown success in trying to enter into nursing.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

Is there more time, Mr. Chair, or am I—?

• (1345)

**The Chair:** You only have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Temelkovski. No? Okay.

David Anderson.

**Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you.

Thank you very much for obviously a well-thought-out and coherent holistic look at the problem. I really appreciate that, as I'm sure every other member of the committee does.

The first question then is this. What success have you had in the province of Alberta in discussing this and in persuading the Province of Alberta to pull its weight in this area? Let me maybe add that all hospitals are run.... Mr. Duceppe of the Bloc Québécois makes a good point of saying frequently that the federal government doesn't run a single hospital in the country. I think we run a few clinics perhaps in the north. We do not run universities and colleges, except for the Royal Military College in Kingston. We have no responsibility for professional associations that regulate professions under provincial jurisdiction, and of course, when it comes to employers in business, well over 90% of the labour aspects and business aspects are provincial, not federal. Only some things like the CPR fall under federal jurisdiction.

So the point I'm making is, how successful are you at the provincial level here in Alberta? Connected to that, what about the problems overseas that have led people to come here with a misunderstanding of the situation in Canada? Who is causing this misunderstanding overseas for the professional who is misled into believing that their credentials will be recognized here in Canada?

**Ms. Lucenia Ortiz:** I would like to credit other organizations in terms of some of the successes in the province of Alberta with regard to the foreign-trained nurses and to some extent the international medical graduates.

With regard to the foreign-trained nurses, provincial coalitions have helped a lot in advocating for the provincial government to address this issue. A lot of research was done about five years ago in terms of documenting the challenges faced by foreign-trained nurses, as well as what solutions they think are feasible for them, through the work of the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women. They held a series of round tables. They worked with the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. So it's really intensive advocacy work and working with professional associations.

There is a provincial organization of internationally trained medical doctors. The Alberta Network of Immigrant Women helped them in advocating, while working very closely with the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons. Research, round table discussions, and consultations with stakeholders are some of the things that happened way before we had this current situation. A lot of this is voluntary advocacy work by provincially based coalitions.

About two years ago, the Alberta government created the Alberta international medical graduate program, where both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta offered some residency positions. There used to be only six for each. With continuous advocacy work, there are now about 16 residency positions for IMGs in Calgary and 22 at the University of Alberta. But every year close to 100 international medical graduates come to Alberta. So it demonstrates some small success, but it's not enough to create a significant impact in terms of addressing the issue.

• (1350)

**Hon. David Anderson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.):** I'd like to follow up on a question David asked. Maybe someone can answer in terms of where the problem stems from, number one.

Number two, you mentioned, Patrick, that once someone lands here, no matter what country they come from with their education, their credentials should be recognized. We should all be treated the same. I'm sure you're aware that even in Canada we rate the universities. They're not all the same. Some schools around the world are at par with Canadian standards and others are not. So perhaps we can rethink that one, or maybe you can shed more light on that, how we should look at them in the same vein.

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** I would like to address the first issue that was taken up by Mr. David Anderson awhile ago with regard to where the problem stems from.

One of the things we gathered from our community dialogues was that the point system, as it applies to the entry of an immigrant in this country, has to be addressed. There should be continuity in the information provided in the country of origin, where this applicant has passed the point system with flying colours. Applicants do not know what they will experience when they come to Canada. The point system gives you the opportunity to practise—that is the message you get when you pass the point system. You think you will be able to practise your profession. You don't foresee any of these challenges that so many of us have experienced. We sell all our property because we want to make a new home in Canada, and then we come and experience all these problems with credentials, licences, and so forth. You cannot practise.

You're a lawyer. You come here, and you're a dishwasher. You're a nurse. You come here, and you're a caregiver—not even a licensed caregiver.

These things must start where these people are first interviewed. There has to be a real-world situation that they tell you about. You need to know what you will encounter when you come to this country, the reality you will experience. That's one problem we identified in our community gatherings. It should start in the country of origin when you pass the point system interview. So the federal government should have a bit of a link in giving applicants real information about what they will experience here.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** But it would be too much to say that the federal government should have a financial responsibility for the people after they come in. I think that's a far stretch.

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** That is not what I'm addressing, the financial. What I'm addressing is the people who come here on the point system. Most of the time, they are from well-to-do families. They have money. The problem is how to cultivate themselves to be able to work in the profession they followed in their country of origin. There should be information on the things that will happen, and it should start with orienting the people doing the point-system hiring of these immigrants who come over to Canada.

We're saying that they should be educated and made aware that there's inconsistency in information. We should not mislead these people. We should start educating them. We should help to make their lives a little easier when they come to live in Canada.

**Mr. Patrick Iroegbu:** Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

The issue of foreign credentials, as I said before, will continue to be hard to debate until an acceptable model is devised. What we are finding from all our difficulties and consultations is that this model has not been in place; it has not been initiated. What we have is what we may call patches. For example, there are little bridging programs in different professions that have some sort of basic entry point to allow people to get into the system.

What we are looking at is a broader perspective whereby the federal government does not leave the provincial government to tackle this as if it is their issue alone. There must be what we call a federal model that has to integrate into the various provinces and cities as a whole, whereby, for example, we look at first degree holders. I very much agree with you when you say that even here in Canada, universities and institutions are discriminating, are caught in

this; they bring people forward according to their results on the course content that they provide.

But the issue I'm addressing is based on what we have gathered from interviews, from interactions, and from workshops. How do these people feel, because most of these people who are coming here are people who come from reputable universities, colleges, and institutions, and who have worked in different reputable institutions and organizations and, in fact, have acquired reputable experience. If they had not had these, I do not think, based on my own experience, that Canada would have allowed them to enter here.

The point of interview is very rigorous. The assessment is very rigorous. If you are approved, it means you are a hot market for Canadian society. The impression we get is that once you are approved and you come here, getting a job is as easy as anything. Upon arrival in Canada, you discover that it is a different world. The first embarrassment you get is, "Oh, I am an idiot. I'm no longer educated. All my years of experience and education is useless in Canada. Where am I?" That's the feeling we get from all these guys

In fact, if you come to the community of these people, it's like we have formed a kind of court or a gossiping society, where everybody is a gossip, but nobody has an answer to it.

We have looked at it both from a mature emotional perspective and from an intellectual perspective to see what can we put on the table, what can we suggest to start a process of harmonizing and giving people the opportunity to come here. If you're a graduate, we should have a program that can get you back into the system, bearing in mind that you are coming from somewhere else. Canada has a different system. We're not saying to insert them into that system automatically, but we should have a program that will enable them to find themselves at the level where they belong and then be able to contribute.

● (1355)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go on to the point person appointed by the Prime Minister on this issue, Dr. Fry.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

I wanted to say, Tessie, that you made a very important point. For the people who come here in the future, there needs to be some way, before they get here, that they can assess themselves, so that they can know whether their technical language skills are up to scratch, so that they can know where the jobs are. In other words, they're not all in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary, which is where everyone wants to go.

We've heard this. I've travelled around the country. I've met with the various groups, and they've told us that this is important. So we've been working with the provinces and with some of the regulatory bodies that are ready—the nurses are ready, the doctors are ready, the engineers are ready; others are still getting ready—and with sector councils and unions, to have an immigration portal. The people who will be coming, from now on, will be able to get on—and depending on which regulatory body is ready to go on that portal—assess themselves from back home. They'll be able to check out what new credits they need or what other experiential model they have, and even, in some instances, do an examination and be accepted.

And there will be an ability to go onto that portal and see that there are jobs in Sudbury, there are jobs in Fort St. John—they're looking for neurosurgeons there or nurses there or whatever—so they can be in contact with those groups and be able to get in there.

So that's happening. I think one of the things the federal government can do is take a leadership position on this. And we have done that.

You've heard that every province is responsible, under legislation, for the regulatory bodies. Every province is responsible, in health care especially, as the employer. So the provinces have to be able to find residency programs and the six-month or one-year upgrading for nurses, depending on what you find. The money has been put in to deal with that and it's going to be rolling out now.

There is a big problem, and I don't know if you can find a way to resolve it, because we've heard different solutions to it. Where will you send the doctors and the nurses—and I'm speaking about health care providers, because that's what you mostly spoke about—to do their residencies or their internships, when the tertiary care teaching hospitals, which are in the big cities, don't have room, because they have been inundated with every level of internship student and resident—year one, two, three, four, five, etc.?

How do you see a process rolling out in which people could do that internship training in Red Deer, or maybe in Fort St. John or Sudbury or somewhere like that? How do you see that rolling out for the nurses? We've had some responses, but I'd be interested in hearing yours.

• (1400)

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** The way I look at it is that there are so many areas in health care where nurses could gain experience in terms of gaining a Canadian overview of what nursing practice is about. They could be in continuing care settings, which are less aggressive than tertiary or secondary hospitals. They could go to a primary hospital—that would be the next step, to go from a continuing care setting to a primary hospital—and then to a secondary hospital. Once they enhance their experience and their learning ability in terms of progressing to more complex nursing practice, they can enhance themselves in a tertiary level of experience or internship.

There is also home care, because a lot of people I know already have public health experience in nursing. There are so many of them that already have good public health exposure. The home care setting is one thing that could open the door to internships, or give them work experience so they can find out what goes on in Canada in that setting.

Another area as well is privately owned hospitals. There are some privately owned hospitals, such as continuing care hospitals and seniors facilities, that could provide these people with firsthand experience in nursing practice. This would help them, because there are more people available to help them, because they're not too complex in the scenario of experiences they would be exposed to.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** You know that a college of nursing has to OK the facility as one in which that nurse can be supervised appropriately, with an appropriate level of supervision and with an assessor assessing them as they do this.

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** Yes.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** That has presented a sort of practical problem in some instances, especially with home care, where you would need to have somebody with the nurse all the time doing the assessment. The problem is that if you don't have enough nurses you don't have one to be there all the time doing the assessment. It's like a chicken-and-egg syndrome here: which comes first?

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** There used to be a program called the CORE program, creating opportunity for re-entry to employment, which was funded by the federal government. This CORE program gives those people who lack experience in their own profession the opportunity to be mentored by people. It is all done on a volunteer basis. Whoever would like to volunteer to mentor the individual makes a commitment to that. It is already informally done also by our organization, which is a non-profit organization called the Filipino Nurses Association in Alberta, which encompasses membership from all ethnic groups. We do that. We have a network including every continuing care and every tertiary and secondary hospital. If I know a key person who has been here in Canada and has good experience, a good reputation in nursing practice, we ask them to volunteer to do the mentorship of these people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That will be the last word.

I would encourage people, instead of using “foreign credentials”, to use “international credentials”. It sounds a little better.

Thank you very much. When we do a report we will pass it on to you. We very much appreciate your contribution.

We're going to take a two-minute break until the next group comes in here. We'll resume in two minutes.

**Ms. Tessie Oliva:** Thank you so much.

• (1404)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1410)

**The Chair:** We're going to reconvene.

You've been here for a while and have seen how we operate. We'll have people make five-minute presentations, after which we'll go to questions from the members.

Let's go on and have a great, fruitful discussion.

Mr. Kaye, you may start, please.

**Mr. Al Kaye (Engineer, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know you've had a lot of interesting information come out of these hearings. I intend to speak today about the problem in the engineering business and how I see it relating to the issue of immigration. The two are inextricably linked, and there are some serious things happening in both areas.

I've added a handout to my package. I hope you all have it. If anybody doesn't have it, I have some extra copies. Does everybody have it?

**The Chair:** Is it bilingual?

**Mr. Al Kaye:** No, I'm afraid not.

**The Chair:** No, we can't distribute it. But we'll get it translated.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** I guess what I'm saying as an engineer is that I'd be deficient if I didn't supplement my presentation with data.

**The Chair:** It might be the case, but it's a pretty tough rule. If the chair tried to do otherwise, the chair would be in trouble.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** Of course. I understand completely.

I only heard about this two weeks ago, so I just got it done.

**The Chair:** Okay, we appreciate it.

The clerk informs me that we got your brief a while ago.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** The first issue is lack of opportunities and the myth of a technical skills shortage; the second issue is appropriation of opportunity and experience by the unqualified and those unwilling to make the educational learning sacrifices necessary to become properly qualified.

There are over 45,000 engineers in this province. There are no records on the number who are unemployed or, more seriously, underemployed, or on those who do not even register in the clumsy statistics. I personally know of over a thousand unemployed engineers; by estimates, ten times this number are underemployed. Engineering businesses are an even bigger tragedy. There are no statistics here either, but from my own records more than 90% do not survive seven years.

Every couple of months there are over 400 reported violations of compliance under the Engineering Act. There are thousands constantly occurring in every major centre, never reported or repudiated. I know of no other regulated profession where individuals can don white coats and walk around calling themselves doctors, lawyers, accountants, or whatever—or, more seriously, work in that practice—without a shred of qualification, or sometimes with ridiculous credentials. These individuals certainly fail to meet the criteria mandatory for a regulated profession. Any of those jobs require a current and valid licence, and entry is barred without it. I know that because my wife is in the medical profession.

The members of the professional association are not interested in these issues because they believe it is not for them to advocate or formulate social policy or to interfere in business issues. The association of technologists, on the other hand, sees the complete opposite of this and advocates strongly and aggressively in all areas.

This is not a situation anything like that of the medical profession, where the supply of medical professionals is tightly regulated. Governments and institutions actively promote women, minorities—in fact, all groups—to enter engineering. I have no problem with that; but my question is, where are the jobs? If you engage such people, you rely with confidence upon the assurance that they are trained and qualified, that the firms in which they are employed duly ensure that they are licensed to practise and are so qualified. This does not happen in engineering.

Look at the job advertisements. They clearly tell the story: "Design engineer wanted with  $x$  years of industry experience. Drafting skills required. SAIT, NAIT, or college training an asset". SAIT and NAIT are technical institutions. I could show you hundreds of our association magazines where there might be three or four jobs for specialized engineers being offered and 30 or 40 engineers trying to find positions.

I know you've been pressured under the guise of a shortage of qualified people. That is self-serving nonsense. The University of Alberta graduates 5,000 engineers. It has just increased its enrolment enormously in engineering by adding two new faculties and two new buildings. By far the majority of engineering students then leave. Why? It's lack of opportunity. Two years after I graduated, the whole class that followed behind me in the master's program all left, every single one of them.

Where are the pages of job ads? When I applied to come to Canada in 1982, there were 34 pages of job ads for engineers in Edmonton and Calgary. You do not see that now; the jobs are just not there. Search the Internet; there are precious few. I am subscribed to every job listing on the Internet, and every job I find demands overqualification and is in some unbelievable place or in the United States or Qatar or in the Middle East somewhere—and they expect you to pay your own way there for a temporary position. Ridiculous amounts of specialization are often required, and many are poor opportunities for repayment of significant educational debts. Often the outcome of these ads is preordained. They're just trying to test the water or to steal the few people available from a competitor who's struggling to keep his talent gainfully employed.

I know of salesmen, teachers, doormen, shoe salesmen, insurance people, baggage handlers, tradesmen, lab techs, researchers, artists and completely unqualified people who are gainfully employed doing engineering, but they have no training and completely inadequate skills to be performing the work they are assigned. A large part of the work I get is correcting screw-ups on jobs that should never have been touched by the people who were well paid to work on them. This is what happens with impunity, and nothing can be done about it. It is done in the name of being competitive with offshore and third world countries where the practice is widespread. Why are we copying these appalling practices?

I know this is a big issue because Thomas Friedman talked about it two nights ago on *Frontline*. He's just published a book on the same issue. Pope John Paul had it as one of his main theme issues, and I have attached two of his papers.

● (1415)

**The Chair:** Could you come to your conclusion?

**Mr. Al Kaye:** Okay.

I understand the issues with companies having to be competitive with overseas, but the point I'm trying to make is that we have a serious issue with engineering training and use of our engineering skills here in Canada. Engineering is going to give us the skills and the knowledge to move forward in the next 10 or 20 years. Being competitive and racing to the lowest bottom dollar is not the answer. Bringing in temporary foreign workers just because they're cheap... and largely they're unqualified and underqualified. If they were qualified, they would pass through the qualification criteria. So what I'm saying is—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We really have run over. Maybe somebody will give you an opportunity during questions to expand on that.

Mr. Alavi.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi (As an Individual):** Thanks.

All that glitters is not gold. It can be diamonds too. An interesting thing about diamonds and coal is the fact that they are both forms of carbon. The difference is that a diamond undergoes a special processing and it gets the opportunity.

I want to talk about the situation of foreign-trained pharmacists, but I want to talk about some of the solutions and some of the barriers I have identified.

The number of prescriptions in Canada rose by 162 million from 1994 to 2004, and the health care dollars rose from \$8.4 billion to \$17.3 billion, while the number of pharmacies increased from approximately 6,500 in 1995 to 7,400 in 2003. According to the statistics from the Alberta Drug Utilization Board, 16% of the prescriptions are filled wrong. If you look at the huge numbers of prescriptions that are filled, you'll see there is a big problem somewhere.

The solution is the inclusion of foreign-trained pharmacists. There is a greying of the workforce; a number of pharmacists who are in the workforce right now are going to vanish soon; not enough pharmacists are coming into the workforce; the baby boomers are

retiring; new laws like privacy legislation, the Health Information Act, and profession acts are coming; and electronic health records are coming. That's putting a lot of strain on the existing pool of pharmacists. With the inclusion of foreign-trained pharmacists, the work is going to flow more smoothly.

The four main barriers foreign-trained pharmacists face are as follows.

Barrier one is the fees, which are around \$2,500, including fees for the evaluation process and the two parts of the qualifying examination.

Barrier two is the lack of jobs. If a person only has a high school education, they're able to work in a pharmacy as a pharmacy assistant or a technician, while the foreign-trained pharmacist unfortunately is overqualified for these positions.

Barrier three is that the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada only gives pharmacists three attempts at the qualifying examination. The Medical Council of Canada, on the other hand, allows unlimited attempts for physicians, so this puts the pharmacists at a disadvantage.

A study published by the Canadian Medical Association shows that 56% of the errors in the pharmacies happen due to medical prescribing and only 4% happen due to a mistake by the pharmacist. That means the medical profession can be partly blamed for the errors, and not the pharmacists, but the requirements for pharmacists are more stringent.

The good thing is that Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Alberta Learning have partnered to provide a new program, a 35-week program being run at the Bredin Institute, and I'm actually part of that program. I'm a student in that program. However, the government still needs to continue to support programs like this, because for another program in Toronto the fee is around \$12,000.

● (1420)

The barriers to the employment of foreign-trained pharmacists should be removed, and this can be done by giving incentives to chains and private pharmacies. The government can give some kind of incentive so they can employ foreign-trained pharmacists, who can work and be trained for their exam.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we have Monsieur M'pindou.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luketa M'pindou (Alberta Community Representative, Canada - Communauté francophone en situation minoritaire au Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to begin by quoting from my testimony in May 2002 before the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. I quote:

The situation of francophone immigrant health care professionals also requires specific solutions in light of the Official Languages Act. The government must adopt a dynamic policy in this regard so that these professionals are trained according to Canadian methods and integrated into scientific areas dealing with public health care. This could involve Human Resources Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Health Canada and, above all, the province and the college of physicians.

I chose to use the example of foreign doctors because Canada had established, in 2001, a whole new commission on the future of health care. Given the importance the current government attaches to this sector, it is imperative that Canadians across the country receive equitable treatment so as to avoid labour shortages in this sector.

Given Canada's current and future needs, succession in the medical community is cause for growing concern. Those entering the country take a variety of paths, some of which restrict their chances of practising in Canada.

It can be argued that the policies relating to the exams required to obtain authorization to practice in Canada contribute to the emerging category of internationally trained doctors who are unable to practice their profession. We put this policy down to a lack of coordination among various stakeholders. What often happens is that institutions shrug off their responsibilities. Who is really responsible for this file and who has the last say?

Debate on the recognition of internationally-trained doctors is carried out in a vacuum, where those concerned are not even kept informed of developments in this sector. This situation is causing people to work in unrelated fields in order to support their families and make ends meet. As a result, Canadians are much better off to fall sick in a taxi, since they will likely receive help before the ambulance even arrives.

Mr. Chairman, I am aware that some provinces have taken initiatives to recognize the international experience and credentials of immigrants. However, we must continue working hard, since many more obstacles must still be overcome, such as access to information, recognition of training, and the possibility of skills upgrading.

Co-operation among all of the stakeholders that I mentioned before the Romanow commission in May 2002 will promote the socio-professional integration of these professionals. The time has come to focus our attention on recognizing the international experience and credentials of immigrants.

I would like to conclude by recommending that the federal government: improve and simplify information sessions overseas so as to fully inform association; work with all community sectors by organizing information workshops to identify professions facing a labour shortage; and implement a coordination policy in partnership with the provinces and professional associations to create a skills upgrading scheme for internationally trained professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

•(1425)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we have Ms. Gushuliak.

**Ms. Terry Gushuliak (Assistant Registrar, Continuing Competence, Alberta Association of Registered Nurses):** Thank you.

The Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, or the AARN, appreciates this opportunity to speak on the importance of recognition of the education, skills, and experience of internationally educated professionals.

My name is Terry Gushuliak. I am the assistant registrar, continuing competence, at the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and I'm responsible for the assessment of internationally educated registered nurse applications in Alberta.

The AARN has seen a steady increase in internationally educated nurses seeking licensure since 1996. With the looming nursing shortage, these nurses provide a valuable, underutilized resource. Mobilization of this resource is important both for the nurse and for Canada.

I will speak on the four most critical factors related to successful registration of internationally educated nurses and their integration into the Canadian workforce: language fluency, competence assessment, remediation, and transparency of requirements. Each of these factors is impacted by the applicant's progress through immigration.

Language fluency is the biggest challenge. Assessment of nursing competence cannot even begin until language fluency is attained. Language fluency for a profession demands more than just passing academic tests. Technical language, written communication and documentation, verbal skills, and writing skills have all been identified as common deficiencies for the internationally educated nurse.

A major study reported in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* examined the adjustment of international nurses to practice in North America and noted that without language proficiency these nurses exhibited multiple communication deficits. Such communication deficits compromise patient safety and constitute unsafe practice in Canada. The Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses, or CELBAN test, is a new test that assesses English language proficiency as it relates to the context of the nursing profession in Canada. It will be available in April 2005 and has recently been approved by the AARN as evidence of language proficiency.

We recommend that internationally educated nurses should be encouraged to self-assess their language readiness to enable them to take remedial action as needed even prior to their arrival in Canada. Also, CELBAN test centres need to be available and accessible across the country, and profession-specific English-for-nurses courses need to be available, accessible, and affordable.

The second factor is that competence assessment involves more than just a credential review or recognition. Review of an educational credential alone is a flat process that cannot examine the enormous impact of the nurse's original cultural context on her preparedness to practise nursing in Canada. Nursing curricula vary widely around the world. Another study reported in *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* reports on a curriculum review of international nursing programs commonly providing nursing recruits to North America. Differences in nursing program curricula included processes of decision-making, culture-related content, clinical performance expectations, technology expertise, and the use of sophisticated health care equipment, as well as nursing content in specific areas.

The AARN is collaborating with Mount Royal College in Calgary on a prior learning and assessment recognition, or PLAR, research project. This project is developing valid and reliable tools to assess nursing competence at the Canadian entry to practice level. These tools could be used for multiple purposes, including the assessment of internationally educated nurses' competence to practise in Canada and identification of requisite remediation. They could also support continuing competence programs across the country and support Canadian registered nurses' re-entry to clinical practice following a time away.

We recommend that nursing competence assessment centres be developed and funded and that information on licensure requirement processes be made available to internationally educated nurses who are moving to Canada.

The third factor is that remediation programs to address the unique needs of internationally educated nurses are sorely lacking. Regulatory bodies currently have few resources to address the remediation needs of internationally educated nurses. The greatest success has been seen in integrated programs designed specifically for internationally educated nurses, such as the CARE for Nurses project and the Algonquin College foreign-trained nurse project, which include a multi-faceted approach with diverse supports to meet the needs of this very diverse population.

• (1430)

We recommend that remediation courses to address the unique and specific needs of the internationally educated nurse be readily available, accessible, and affordable to internationally educated nurses across Canada.

The fourth factor is that the transparency of requirements to enter professional practice in Canada is critical. Immigration procedures and professional licensure procedures function in isolation of each other, but they impact the internationally educated nurse simultaneously.

We recommend that internationally educated nurses seeking licensure in Canada need access to current comprehensive information on licensure requirements as well as information on Canadian immigration procedures and nursing employment opportunities.

Stakeholders agree that the process for assessment of internationally educated nurses needs improvement. The evidence of projects and programs newly introduced across the country to help integrate internationally educated nurses into Canadian nursing practice is that

they are beginning to show the way in creating new solutions to overcome challenges and are developing strategies that can enhance their success.

The AARN is committed to moving forward with this progress. What can the government do? Provide sustainable funding support for profession-specific nursing courses and CELBAN testing; provide sustainable funding support for initiatives such as PLAR and nursing competence assessment centres; provide sustainable funding support for remediation and bridging courses; facilitate the coordination of information for internationally educated professionals related to immigration procedures, licensure requirements, and employment opportunities; and finally, provide links to Canadian regulatory body websites on the immigration portal.

Thank you.

• (1435)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going go into questions and go around the table.

I am very sorry. Actually I was practising your name, trying to figure it out, and if I get you wrong, you tell me.

Ms. Christina Nsaliwa.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa (Executive Director, Alberta Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies):** If you get it wrong, you just give me five more minutes.

On behalf of the Alberta Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies, AAISA, I would like to thank the members of this committee for granting us this opportunity to share our insights, perspectives, and recommendations around the issue of foreign credentials and experience of immigrants.

AAISA has been around for 25 years, and we serve all new immigrants who come to Alberta and also thousands who are not new, who have been here for some time. We recognize that the issue of credentials and experience recognition has been studied and discussed extensively in the past decade by scholars and others involved with settlement and integration of immigrants into Canadian society. But this presentation is going to focus on barriers or challenges that impact the integration of skilled immigrants and suggest practical actions that would facilitate the effective utilization of immigrants' skills in the labour market.

One of the barriers that we wanted to highlight is inadequate information. It appears there is a great lack of a comprehensive source of information on national, provincial, or regional labour markets in Canada to the people from outside who want to come to Canada. There is also a gap between information provided to immigrant applicants before and during the process regarding their actual opportunity to use their training, skills, and experience in the Canadian workforce. More information on accreditation procedures is the first major barrier to be faced by immigrant professionals. Immigration officers overseas often do not have the necessary knowledge in identifying occupational designations and/or about specific certification requirements for the various trades and professions.

The second barrier is training programs. There are inadequate programs to help identify and bridge the gaps that exist between the skills and knowledge that the new immigrants have in relation to Canadian requirements—skills training, occupation-specific language training, and on-the-job training.

The next one is unwelcoming workplaces or racial attitudes. Unwelcoming workplaces are evident in some employers' hiring decisions and their reluctance to hire immigrants without Canadian experience. They do not even give them an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Although the problem with recognition of immigrants' foreign credentials generally has not been articulated as one of racial discrimination, racial discrimination definitely is one cause of skills underutilization.

Ethnic and racial stereotypes may affect perceptions of immigrant qualifications. This is evident when employment decisions are based on the candidates' racial background rather than on their skills. We have lots of examples to share, if you are interested, to illustrate that point. It has been noted that the groups affected by skills underutilization are primarily racial minorities. This has been viewed as evidence of racial discrimination.

Credential assessment. Often the accreditation process is ambiguous, marked by red tape and inconsistent practices that work to the disadvantage of immigrant professionals. Furthermore, systemic barriers like licensing requirements, language proficiency, and discrimination prevent the impartial evaluation of foreign credentials. There is little or a lack of national or provincial coordination, standardization, or transparency of assessment. High expenses associated with some assessment and examination fees discourage some immigrants from proceeding.

Now I'll move to some of the recommendations that we would like to make. One obviously is information dissemination. There is a need to improve information sources for immigrants about Canadian labour markets, including accurate occupation-specific information, before they immigrate and after they arrive in Canada to prepare them and to increase awareness and usage of the available programs and services.

● (1440)

On assessment and accreditation, there's a need to encourage and support collaborative efforts by various stakeholders, government, professional bodies, colleges, etc., to collectively develop assessment tools and approaches that have national utility to ensure consistency and fairness. There's a need for the federal government

to develop mechanisms and assessment tools that will enable immigrants to assess their academic credentials, training, and other competencies before they come to Canada.

On bridging programs, we need to increase funding for immigrant settlement services to enable the provision and accessibility of bridging programs. We also need to have some kind of subsidized workplace internships and mentorship for immigrants. We need to provide more specialized advice and counselling, and career planning and management programs to assist foreign-trained immigrants to re-enter their professions. We also need to provide financial support in the form of low interest rates and tuition deferrals to immigrants while they are going through bridging programs.

On employers and the workplace, we need to develop some strategies that promote the importance of inclusive workplaces; involve communities and businesses in initiatives that help immigrants feel welcome, respected, and included in the workplace; and fund more programs that educate employers and gatekeepers to professions on diversity, multiculturalism, human rights, and immigration, and that educate the public on the contribution of immigrants as well.

In closing, I would say that in order to effectively address the challenge of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, government leadership at all levels of government will be required to coordinate the various stakeholders that share the responsibility for the various aspects of the utilization of immigrant skills. CIC is responsible for immigration; the province, regulatory bodies, and so on—and then the cities too. Cities are where the immigrants settle. All of these have to work together if we are going to deal with the issues effectively.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to start with Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

We only have five minutes, so I'm going to try to keep my questions brief. I hope you can keep your responses brief, because I want to ask a few of you questions. I might cut you off if I need to go to the next question.

I want to start with you, Mr. Kaye. It seems to me that you're suggesting the professional organization representing the engineers is allowing people to get through who aren't properly trained. Maybe you could clarify that for me. I didn't quite understand what you were saying.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** I really should clarify. This is an enormous dilemma that's tearing apart the associations right across the country. No, they are not letting non-qualified people get registration. What you're finding is that there are many thousands of people who are practising and are not qualified.

How many of the technologists have gone forward to apply to become engineers? They can do that. The association has bent over backwards to enable that to happen. The answer is that they're not getting qualified as professional engineers because they don't need to. They're gainfully employed without bothering.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Are they only falsifying their credentials? Is that what you're suggesting? For instance, how are they getting these jobs without the proper qualifications?

**Mr. Al Kaye:** They call themselves engineers. It's fraud. It's as simple as that.

The issue that disturbs me is that companies are going to the immigration department and the government and asking for more skilled workers. They're doing nothing to upgrade the people out there who are unemployed. What they want is a vast pool of semi-skilled workers, and they're not contributing to bringing these people into qualification.

I agree entirely with what Ms. Nsaliwa says. We need to do far more to assist the people who have their educational qualifications to become fully licensed professionals, but we're not doing that. We're letting these half-baked fraud artists practise engineering. It's not doing the country, our profession, or anybody any good. For the oil companies to come to the government to get temporary workers and temporary permits to bring in vast quantities of labour on the fraudulent misrepresentation that they need more skilled workers, is an abuse. It's horrific.

•(1445)

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** I'm not sure that I understood, Mr. Alavi, what you were suggesting. When you mentioned that you were talking about some of these prescriptions not being properly filled and some challenges with pharmacists, were you relating to a similar issue as Mr. Kaye was talking about, where some people who are filling prescriptions are not necessarily properly accredited? Could you clarify that? I misunderstood what you were saying.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** That's definitely related. I was actually the instructor for the pharmacy assistant program at the Bredin Institute. All of my students got a job, but when I tried to apply for a job there was nothing. Bredin employed me, but I tried to go to hospitals and everything. I have four years' experience in New York as a pharmacy intern and then one year of experience in Canada, and I'm not working, but people who do a four-month training program are working in the pharmacies. These things are going to happen.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** I see. So even though you have been trained, the assessment of your experience is not being done appropriately. That's what you mean?

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** Exactly, because I'm overqualified. No pharmacy wants to employ me because I'm overqualified, and they know I won't stay because I'm on the way to becoming a licensed pharmacist, so they don't want to employ me as a pharmacy assistant or technician. That means a hundred people are here; there's a cut-off if you don't make it—three attempts and then you're out. There

should be some attempt to put the people who are here, over here. The pool is there.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** I see what you mean. I think that ties in with the whole process of assessment, getting people's credentials properly recognized, getting the things in place to do that.

I think, Christina, you mentioned trying to find effective strategies to actually get these people, then, to have the Canadian experience. I think you were mentioning the same thing.

There have been groups that have suggested different alternatives for trying to get that in place. For instance, if someone is properly accredited and has gone through the process, government may perhaps create the incentive—for instance, whether it be a grant, if they do hire someone with international credentials but no Canadian experience—to get them that ability to get into the workplace, and as well, potentially tax incentives for companies to do so. Is that something you think would be along the right lines for strategy, according to what you've suggested, to set some sort of strategy in place to get these international credentials to get Canadian experience?

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** I guess, yes, that's true. The incentives don't only have to be to the immigrants, but to the employers who are sharing the best practices, yes.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** That's something we're hearing, and we may have to develop a little further. It sounds as if that would probably encourage that Canadian experience ability, once they've gone through the process.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You were just dead-on.

Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** My question is for Ms. Nsaliwa. How many Albertan agencies do you represent?

[*English*]

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** We have 19 member agencies that belong to the association, and they are from seven communities across the province.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** What I'm finding today is that a lot of the initiatives that we have in Alberta are similar to those in Quebec as well. We also have agencies that do recruitment and that help in the integration of immigrants. They're having quite a success in regions, but what they're finding is that there is an inequality between the offer and the demand. Many qualified people from immigration are too qualified for the jobs that are necessary in regions. In addition to submitting candidates, they've been doing follow-ups and education...but their comments often were that they didn't have enough funding.

Is this something you've observed as well?

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** Yes, that's very true. There isn't enough funding, and in most cases it's sometimes just project funding, so there's no sustainability of the programs. You can start a program, but then you can't continue it because you don't have the funding.

•(1450)

**Ms. Meili Faille:** So you experience the same thing as we do.

The government is also asking for projects, but there's no sustainability in many years, so the effort is always to redo on a project basis.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** That's true.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all of the presenters for your testimony. It's hard, because I have questions for all of you, but I'm not going to get to them all, unfortunately.

I'll start with Ms. Nsaliwa.

Ms. Nsaliwa, there's a lot of talk about people self-assessing overseas and using the portal that Dr. Fry has often described for us. I'm wondering what your take is on that. Is that something a lot of your clients and the people you've dealt with would be able to access, in terms of access to the Internet, and a familiarity with the use of the Internet?

With regard to that, we keep hearing that potential immigrants are the ultimate optimists. If they've made the decision to leave their home country, for whatever reason, they tend to look for and reinforce their hopes of coming to Canada so that in terms of self-assessment they're often perhaps more generous than they might be in that kind of process.

I'm wondering if you can let me know what your take might be on that.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** When you talk about self-assessment, what kind of self-assessment do you mean?

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** It sounds to me like it's often through the portal, and that kind of thing.

**The Chair:** No. To clarify, I think the portal is what we're going to be putting in place.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** The client would access that information and do the work to come up with at the assessment, so I'm just wondering what—

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** It's what is going to happen here anyway. It's just happening somewhere else, that's all.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** I asked that question because in the assessment that's going on right now people provide their certificates, diplomas, and letters to show their experience, but that's about it. There's no assessment of their qualifications by themselves, in terms of regulatory or credentialing bodies, and so on.

I don't think that kind of information, the assessment they do right now, tells them anything about what they will go through when they come to Canada. They're mostly basing that decision to come on the fact that the government is telling them, "We need you. We need skilled workers in the country". That's why they come. When they get here, most of them are so frustrated that if they had the opportunity they might even want to go back, because they had good

jobs where they came from. They feel like they were misled because there was no information provided to them.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** You mentioned the problems around racism and discrimination that people encounter here in Canada. Can you point to any examples of programs, in working with employers in the private sector, that have been effective in dealing with that? Do you have any experience with that kind of program?

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** I'm not sure if I can point to any programs that have been effective. I know there are programs out there to educate employers and so on, but I cannot point to any particular one.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** This is my last question: is the private sector taking any initiatives in these regards on their own? It seems that Alberta is the land of free enterprise and less government reliance, or at least that's the stereotype we often hear. If there are worker shortages, if there are shortages in particular professional groups in Alberta, are any of the employers taking the initiative and putting up money themselves to help newcomers find positions within their organizations, without assistance from government, or is everybody looking for assistance from government, even here in Alberta?

**Mr. Al Kaye:** If you read my brief, you'll see that's absolutely the fact. I did two degrees after I came here, to get qualified and upgrade to become eligible for registration. I have never had a penny paid for any training. I don't know of anybody in the oil industry who has. That's pretty appalling. They're not willing to upgrade their own workers.

•(1455)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** There isn't the culture in Canada, I suppose, of employers participating a lot in retraining of their employees. In many other countries, a lot of employers put a lot of money into that.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** That's exactly right. That's one of the major problems.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Mr. M'pindou, from your brief, which was helpful, I just wonder if you can tell me what the Citizenship and Immigration Canada-Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee is and what kind of work that committee does.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luketa M'pindou:** Our committee was created in March 2002. After three years of work, we have developed a strategic framework with a view to encouraging francophone immigration. It includes five objectives, the third of which is economic integration.

In this regard, we work with other organizations and other departments, such as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Industry Canada, and also within the framework of the Canada-British Columbia Western Economic Partnership agreement, in order to put into place some initiatives with the goal of encouraging socio-economic integration of professionals.

We will introduce, probably in June 2005, a five-year action plan that will include initiatives in this regard. I was recently in Halifax, where the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration tabled a summary of the initiatives that we have put in place to prepare the implementation of this five-year plan.

[English]

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Dr. Fry.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you.

I don't know if I really understood what Mr. Alavi said. It seems to me there are problems that have more to do with the College of Pharmacists than with government. Whom they regulate or allow to practise is a decision made by the College of Pharmacists, not by any level of government.

Mr. Kaye, I have been working closely with your national body, and they have actually admitted that there are not enough jobs, that there are too many engineers. They have also told me that some people who came here as engineers, with an "engineering degree", are really technicians. They're trying to get them work as technicians, rather than as engineers. Some of the bridging that they are talking about would have to do with getting people into the slots they think are appropriate for them, as opposed to getting them to work as full-fledged engineers. I wanted your comment about that.

I wanted to thank Madame Nsaliwa for her recommendations. They're in line with the ones we've been hearing everywhere. I just wanted to ask, what role do you see your organization playing in doing some of this bridging to help to get internationally trained workers ready to do their exams? Would you have any solutions if you could find the funding, say, from the federal government to help them to prepare for exams, etc.? Do you see a role for yourself in enhanced language training, or providing one-stop shopping for Canadian experience?

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** I have three basic recommendations.

First, government should continue the funding for bridging programs like the one at Bredin.

Second, government should give incentives to employers to hire us. A lot of my friends are delivering pizzas. I'll probably end up delivering pizzas myself, but I'm capable of doing more. I was an instructor at a pharmacy assistant program, and I'm capable of doing more than delivering pizzas or working at a grocery store. I have four years of U.S. experience and two pharmacy degrees.

Third, we don't have a manual. We only have "three strikes and you're out". The medical graduates don't have to do that, so why us?

• (1500)

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** That's a College of Pharmacists issue, not a government one. The "three strikes and you're out" is your regulatory body making its own rules. It's a self-regulating body. The government cannot intervene in that. You're going to have to deal with this body on that.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** The government could bring some legislation that would have a stream B, where people are trained on the job. At least, give some incentive to the employer so that they welcome us with open arms and not treat us like untouchables.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** I'm very interested in what you're saying about your meetings with the association of engineers. But what disturbs me is, how did a certain company get a temporary foreign work permit to bring in 1,400—it's in my package—skilled workers? This was brought up in the house in Alberta just last week. Last year

unemployment was 9.4%, so how did that company get the immigration department to sign off on that? This is disturbing.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Provinces have a jurisdiction by which they can do a nominee program, under an agreement made between the federal government and provinces. Provinces can decide what sort of workers they need, and do a nominee program. Then they work with particular employers to fulfil their needs. Alberta will fulfil what Alberta decides is needed, and it's the same with Quebec. Quebec will decide what Quebec's needs are.

**Mr. Al Kaye:** Mr. Cardinal recently said in the house, "Mr. Speaker, to start with, you cannot at the provincial level approve temporary foreign workers. So whose problem is it?"

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** It's under the nominee program, though. There's an agreement under the nominee program.

Ms. Nsaliwa.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** Actually, some member agencies provide a lot of programs. Some of the programs have to do with employment. We have programs where we orient the newcomers to the job market. We equip them with job-seeking and job-retention skills. We also have programs, like enhanced language training, that are specific to the different occupations they would be going into. We're packed with businesses. If we had the money, if we had the funding, we would be able to have more of these programs. They are there, but they're not adequate. If we had the money, we would have enough programs to meet the needs of most of our clients.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask Kashif Alavi two questions.

Are there licensed pharmacy assistants in Canada?

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** At this point in time, no. There is a health professions act coming that might.... That's in Alberta. I'm not sure about federally.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Because I wasn't aware of their being licensed right now, and you mentioned there may be somebody practising....

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** That might happen.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Secondly, you also mentioned that potential candidates can write the exam three times.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** Right.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Is that internationally trained candidates or Canadian-trained candidates?

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** Anybody can write them.

What we want the government to do is try to convince the pharmacy examination board that three is not the right number. It can increase to say four or five. The magic number three doesn't have to be there. Medical writers don't have it; the U.S. doesn't have it.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** I intervened in one case, and they did let somebody write one more time, and the person failed again. I'll tell you one other thing. If that person, after six times, is allowed to practise, I think those 16% of prescriptions that are being filled wrong are going to increase to 36%.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** I totally agree. But the problem is when you come in, you go to employers and they force you to write the exam. I started in May, and my employer said, "You have to take the exam". After two months in the workforce, I took the exam.

It's the employers who sort of force the foreign-trained pharmacists to take the exam when they're not ready. And there is no support available, there are no books available, no manuals available. There needs to be a manual that would help us—and help the employers.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** That's a good suggestion.

I have one question for everybody, I guess, if you can delve into it a little bit. Are we having problems with applicants not knowing what is available here prior to their coming to Canada, not knowing what the required credentials are? As far as I know, the department doesn't go out and recruit doctors or pharmacists or nurses; it's people who are asking to come over. If you had come from the States, I'm sure you would have looked into it and found out what is required in Canada for other professionals.

• (1505)

**Ms. Terry Gushuliak:** Can I speak to that?

From a nursing perspective, nursing is an old profession; there are nurses around the world. But the preparation levels vary widely. We have had applications from nurses in other countries whose preparation was in public school; it was not at a post-secondary level. It astonishes me that there isn't a common understanding of what the requirement is when they are arriving in Canada. Anything we could do to promote a better understanding of the level of preparation that is requisite, as well as what the practice environment demands, would facilitate success on both sides.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** I wanted to add that I personally feel not enough information was provided to me. I came with more dreams than could be substantiated.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** That's what immigrants come with—a lot of dreams.

Christina had a comment.

**The Chair:** One more.

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** I just wanted to say there are people out there, outside Canada, who are actually recruiting for Canada. There are a lot of people who go out and say Canada needs workers, and there are a lot of government documents that say we need the workforce for many reasons, and so on. So it is based on this that people are coming. Yes, they do choose to come, or they can choose not to come, but if somebody comes and tells you they need you, they need a workforce, they need skilled workers, and so on, people will come.

It's not a promise as such, but it is, in a way. They are being told they are needed, so they do come.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Are these people you're talking about consultants who charge fees?

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** Those are just some of them. But then in government documents and so on, they are always talking about the need for skilled workers. So when you are applying on the points system, you are asked that. If you don't qualify, if your qualifications are not needed in Canada, you don't get the points so you don't get to come. If you get the points, it means your skills are needed in Canada. So people base their decisions on that, knowing that they will be hired when they're here.

**The Chair:** I think it's a major initiative that the government is taking and the portals are being developed. There is \$20 million a year for the next five years. I guess the whole effort is going to be to inform. That's one thing we have heard from everybody. Let's have truth in advertising and let's make sure we have realistic expectations. Hopefully, this initiative is going to work in that regard.

I'm going to go on to Ms. Grewal.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your time and your presentations.

I would like to ask each one of you, what can we do to recognize foreign credentials? Could you please tell us in a nutshell, each one of you, in just a few lines?

**Ms. Christina Nsaliwa:** I think I did already. I have some recommendations that were made. If you got my paper, they are all listed on there.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luketa M'pindou:** I support my colleague. As she said, that was part of her recommendations. It is also part of mine. I say in one of my recommendations that we should create a skills upgrading scheme for internationally trained professionals. There needs to be a political will. Let us consider this situation as we would a natural disaster. How did the Canadian government react when there was a natural disaster? That is the kind of decision that this government must make in order to react to this situation. It's been going on for years and the time has come to consider as a natural disaster the situation of immigrant professionals who, at some point or other, will be able to contribute to the economic well-being of our country.

Thank you.

• (1510)

[*English*]

**Mr. Al Kaye:** If you look in the attachment to my brief, and you'll be able to read it later, you'll see I've included references to a number of other studies by the federal government, and particularly the B.C. government, that have looked at all these questions. This has been studied before.

It's not just an issue of the qualifications upfront. This portal business is a great idea, but it's only part of it. It's what we do afterwards. The point I'm trying to make here is we have this enormous waste of resources. I think everybody's told you that. What I'm saying is the jobs have to be there. I think industry has to contribute. If they want skilled people, they have to help some of these immigrants get on board, if they're properly qualified, and after a year or whatever, or however many years they need in passing the exams, they can become qualified. I think everybody ought to participate and join in.

I agree with Mr. Luketa. It's a travesty. It's a tragedy. It's a waste of human resources. It's going to ruin the country in terms of our competitiveness. Just bringing in cheap, semi-skilled labour is not the answer. That's all we're doing. We're toadying to corporate welfare.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gushuliak.

**Ms. Terry Gushuliak:** One of the most promising projects that I have participated in is the prior learning assessment and recognition project that's currently occurring at Mount Royal College in Calgary. In the nursing profession here in Alberta, we've had nursing refresher programs to bridge, etc., for internationally educated nurses.

What the PLAR program promises is that each individual can be assessed and only those places where they are requiring remediation will be addressed. So the entire process to gain licensure and to be integrated into practice would be shortened appropriate to each individual.

At the moment, one of the limitations that we recognize is that many of the bridging programs are cookie-cutter approaches where they need to complete perhaps redundant theory and practice that is unnecessary. The PLAR project offers the best promise that I've seen in decades.

**Mr. Kashif Alavi:** I agree with her. I would like to add that the bridging program should be supported and also some type of on-site training. So many pharmacies are closing because of the shortage of pharmacists. People working in grocery stores are earning less money so they're giving less tax to the government. There should be manuals for the employers and for foreign-trained people that would help them integrate, give them information. There should be continuous quality control that makes sure.... The major problem that is causing these errors is the shortage of pharmacists. That needs to be addressed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll try to sneak in another question to Ms. Gushuliak.

It surprises me there hasn't been stronger competition among provinces to resolve this issue. For instance, given the nursing shortages across Canada where we're desperate for nurses in so many places, it strikes me that we don't hear, or at least we haven't heard yet, of a significant difference among the provinces on where they're at ultimately on the issue of recognition of nursing credentials and foreign nurses. Could you comment on why nobody sees the ball and runs with it to get the edge in that race?

I'm also a little curious about Alberta, which has more financial resources available than other provinces, and why some of the

resources that you said are necessary haven't come from the provincial government. Do you have any idea about that?

It may be asking too much for you to comment on that. Perhaps it's more of an observation.

**Ms. Terry Gushuliak:** I think the provinces that are facing higher rates of immigration are addressing these issues. Not all provinces in Canada receive the same number of immigrants. We are one of the top four provinces in Canada that receives high numbers of nurses specifically. Each year we probably see between 350 and 500 applicants in Alberta.

We are signatories to a mutual recognition agreement across Canada. We participate and work very closely and collaboratively with other regulatory registered nurse bodies across Canada and endorse registration across Canada. We are working very closely with CNA on an internationally educated nurse project right now. For example, the Mount Royal College project is building on the successes of the CARE for Nurses program and the Algonquin College program in Ontario.

We are looking at best practices around the country to try to build a consolidated process that would be applicable and available across the country.

• (1515)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** It's more of a cooperative movement at this point, rather than a competitive one. Is that what you're suggesting?

**Ms. Terry Gushuliak:** I would say that it's cooperative.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Madam Fry.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** I only wanted to comment on the Canadian Nurses Association project, because it has been funded by the federal government.

The only way you can resolve this is to be cooperative. You cannot be in competition with each other. The IMG task force with the doctors is a cooperative one, the task force with the nurses is a cooperative one, and the engineers task force is a cooperative one. Otherwise, you will completely further balkanize what is already a balkanized system, based on provincial jurisdictions only.

You could look at something where if you came to Calgary and somebody wanted to offer you a job in Manitoba, you could go. Right now, you can't. It needs to be cooperative.

**The Chair:** I would like to thank the panel. This has been a very useful discussion.

In closing, let me say that necessity is the mother of invention. In some way, you mentioned Algonquin. I know something about nursing because my wife was one. She left the profession a number years ago when they were downsizing, and she has never gone back. Nursing is a tough profession. Algonquin started looking at how they could do nursing. They realized that they could have some people they could cater to.

I think we must do a much better job, particularly in this time of information technology and also in this time of lifelong learning. The brain waste must not continue.

Thank you very much.

We will take a break for a couple of minutes, and then we'll reconvene.

● (1517) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1527)

**The Chair:** We're going to start with our last panel for the day.

I want to welcome everybody. This is an important topic, and we really appreciate your coming and giving us your time and being part of this process.

The way we start off is with presentations of five minutes, and after them we go into questioning. So please try to keep the five minutes in mind; I'll be giving you hints if you're running over.

Anyway, let's start with Mr. Okelu.

**Mr. Chinwe P. Okelu (As an Individual)** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank you once again for giving us the opportunity to address this committee on this issue which is very important and very serious for immigrant men and women.

[*English*]

Let me begin my presentation by reiterating what I presume you have heard numerous times during your cross-country consultations.

Numerous very qualified and experienced immigrants are suffering untold hardships as a result of their unemployment or under-employment. Many of these people are eminent in their various professional areas, and several of them have actually held very important positions in their countries of origin. It is very disappointing and frustrating for some of them to come to Canada and find out that they're not regarded as alike, that they're not humans any more.

There have been a number of senseless arguments, from my point of view, put forward by what I call vested interests. These are some of the professional organizations who are protecting their turf. They are self-regulating and they're almost playing God. They decide who comes in and who goes out. So I'm suggesting in my presentation here that the federal government has to play a larger role.

I will take an example from what is happening in the country already. There is the agreement on internal trade, which has been organized here in Canada. All the provinces and territories, including the federal government, are participants in that negotiation. This has

been going on since 1995—and I'm sure I'm not telling you what you don't know. I refer you to article 701 of chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade, which states in part that:

The purpose of this Chapter is to enable any worker qualified for an occupation in the territory of a Party to be granted access to employment opportunities in that occupation in the territory of any other Party...

I'm trying to extrapolate from this, but let me finish the second part of it. The second part of this in the same chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade states:

Article 708: Recognition of Occupational Qualifications and Reconciliation of Occupational Standards ...each Party undertakes to mutually recognize the occupational qualifications required of workers of any other Party and to reconcile differences in occupational standards in the manner specified...

As I said, I'm going to extrapolate from this and suggest that the federal government should centralize the evaluation of all qualifications. I know that you can't legislate what is happening in other provinces, because education is a provincial and territorial responsibility, but the federal government is a participant in this particular agreement and should centralize this and have the people who come here send whatever they have, their résumés or experiences, and have a mutual body, with a selection of people from the various professions participating in it, setting standards of measurement.

While I sat here this afternoon, I heard somebody say that someone came here and claimed to be an engineer, but in their own evaluation he was a technician. I almost stood up then, because I wondered what criteria could have been used to evaluate who is an engineer and who is a technician when we don't have some guidelines determining that. I submit that some of these guys who are claiming all of this and are playing God, as I said before, forget that some of these guys read the same textbooks as they did. Some of them have published in international journals, and they come here not to be recognized for what they are.

Yes, there are ways to deal with this. They may not be used to the Canadian style and practice. Some of us, when we first came here, had some problems communicating with some of the people. Eventually, you get to know and communicate very easily and be understood. Why don't we have some mentorship program, where some of these guys are given a chance to grow from there, and eventually come up to the level they are expected to be at? It may not necessarily be that they don't have the knowledge; it may be because they are not able to communicate what they know. This could apply in any profession.

● (1530)

And I have some difficulties when you say, for instance, that people who come from some part of the continent are better than others, while they have practically the same level of education and the same standards. I don't want to name names, but if you want I will do that.

I will stop at this point.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Nielsen.

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen (Executive Director, Alberta Long Term Care Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

My name is Dianne Nielsen and I am the executive director for the Alberta Long Term Care Association. I also have been brought here by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and I've been working with the Alberta chapter.

Our association primarily consists of employers, and the employers are of the public sector, the private sector, and the voluntary sector, which is the non-profit, religious sector.

One of the reasons I'm here is that our association has worked with Alberta Health and Wellness and educational institutes to help with the bridging of people with international qualifications. We have realized through this work that there are a number of people who have immigrated to Canada with a knowledge base derived from their immigration officer. I think they have been in many cases misled, because they have been told their qualifications were transferrable in many cases related to health care workers and other tradespeople who work in our industry.

I only have five minutes. I believe you've already heard about the issues related to the barriers, and we concur that those barriers do exist. The regulating bodies are strict. I think many of them are trying to overcome these barriers but haven't gone quite far enough, especially with health care workers. The AARN certainly have, and we've heard that presentation today.

I think the federal government has a responsibility, when new immigrants come, on access to information. The portal you're talking about is excellent, but we need to go that one step further on access to information.

New immigrants really do not understand our qualifications compared with theirs. In every country around the world they have very valuable education, which we really haven't taken advantage of. They have different cultures, and we're experiencing that, particularly in the health care field, as the sick have many cultures.

With elder care we are now experiencing an older workforce. We really don't know where we're going to get the next-generation workforce. We have the baby boomer workers right across Canada growing old, and the bubble is going like this.

We need the federal government to have immigration laws that encourage the provinces to work with you. Immigration and jobs are there, and I am speaking on behalf of the employer. We want skilled workers. We want to help bridge that gap. We are providing educational programs for them.

There are some overlapping of functions, and I concur with the previous speaker about having a central system where they can be screened. Professional groups can work together with the federal government and the provincial government at every level and have a screening process based on competencies and skills.

Also, even within Alberta the regulatory bodies differ, so if we could bring some sort of centralized screening process across Canada for people coming from other countries, it would certainly help, along with that access to information.

Canada depends on immigrants, and we still need immigrants in our workforce. This whole country is built on immigrants, my parents being part of that process.

Second is the issue with regard to language. We know there are funds available for people to learn English. Even though it is their second language, you find learning English is not necessarily an issue. Once people have learned English, it's the translation into the written portion. We have developed curriculum so they don't actually have to read it; they can do oral examinations.

The third one is the accessibility of bridging that gap to bring that education into line with our education system.

I can see, Mr. Chairman, that you're already waving at me, so I thank you for allowing me to make this presentation.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Paufler.

**Mr. Ralph Paufler (Associate Director, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers):** Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity.

I represent the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and we've been working to help immigrants integrate and succeed in Alberta for almost 25 years. For the past eight years we've been running specialized bridging programs that help internationally educated engineers to integrate into the Alberta workforce at the level of a technologist and then to have the opportunity to—from a position of strength, as we view it, a position of employment—pursue credentialling at a level that suits their interests and aspirations.

I'm sure you've heard a lot about barriers faced by internationally educated professionals coming to Canada, and I'm not going to dwell too much on the barriers. I just want to identify a rather holistic and pragmatic approach to addressing some of the barriers to access and then give some recommendations specifically related to these issues.

There are a number of ways of looking at the challenges highly skilled immigrants face when they come to Canada. We've heard many times that people come with great dreams and great expectations. When they get here, though, the reality is that it's a much harsher world. I'm going to describe an approach to looking at these barriers that categorizes them into three groupings.

The first one is personal barriers. Often nowadays we look at the information needs of immigrants before they come here, and information needs would fall into this category of personal barriers. People don't know about the Canadian educational system when they come here. They don't know about Canadian standards of professional practice. They don't understand the Canadian labour market. They don't even understand how to go about looking for work in the Canadian labour market. Often you look at these as soft skills gaps that internationally educated people would have.

We have some specific recommendations around these personal barriers. The first is to improve access to career counselling from skilled counsellors. In part this could be done by putting more of an effort into providing that service for newly arrived immigrants.

Another recommendation would be to look at increased funding for bridging programs specifically. Even once information needs are addressed and once Canadian work culture is addressed, there are still significant gaps between the recognition of foreign qualifications or international qualifications and the demands or needs of the Canadian workforce.

Bridging programs—ones that incorporate a comprehensive approach to looking at language requirements, information requirements, technical skills requirements, and Canadian work culture knowledge—bridge that gap between where a person coming into the country is now and where they need to be to perform successfully and become integrated. It's been mentioned that mentorship and internship opportunities can help this process. The Government of Alberta last year created five internship opportunities for graduates of one of our bridging programs. All five were hired into Alberta government accounting positions. When the government takes a lead like that in providing those kinds of opportunities, it helps a lot.

Environmental barriers: Skills-bridging programs can address environmental barriers new immigrants experience, such as the technical gaps, the gaps between the kinds of computer skills an internationally trained engineer has and the kinds of computer skills that are required for someone to work effectively in Canada.

Language training programs were mentioned. The recommendation in this area would be to provide greater coordination between the three levels of government around funding for programs to facilitate integration of professionals. We know the Government of Alberta and all the provinces have programs and dollars going into this, as does the federal government; some municipalities do as well. But I think there's a lot of duplication and a lot of overlap.

Increased employment supports: We found that when people attend programs—and our programs run upwards of ten months and are fairly expensive—you can eat up your savings very quickly if you're funding that yourself. In Alberta we have the luxury, for limited numbers of people, of getting living allowance funding during this kind of bridging training.

● (1540)

Alberta could certainly use, in terms of our own needs, access to level 5 LINC training. In Alberta LINC is only funded to lower levels. There seems to be a gap between where LINC ends in Alberta and where other language training programs or labour market needs for skilled workers start. So that's a significant gap for this province.

Occupation-specific language training programs could be funded more aggressively because they provide a way, in a shorter period of time, of getting language to the level that is functional in the workplace for a highly skilled immigrant.

I'm going to jump ahead to talk a little bit about the social barriers, because we can do all kinds of great programming, bridge skills, and find good, solid professional employment for skilled immigrant workers, but if the supports aren't there for the rest of their family—

supports in the school system, supports in the health care system, supports with housing—people are not going to stay. In other words, welcoming communities are critical. The whole family has to be welcomed and encouraged to stay.

● (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we're going on to Mr. Nanuan.

**Mr. Sital Singh Nanuan (Secretary, Sikh Federation of Edmonton):** Good afternoon, committee members, ladies and gentlemen.

Much has been said so far, but I will repeat a few of the things.

A number of legislative measures have been taken at the federal and provincial levels to provide constitutional safeguards against injustices and discrimination based on culture, religion, language, etc. These include the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Employment Equity Act, the Official Languages Act, the Pay Equity Act, and the Multiculturalism Act. Unfortunately, these do not address the very serious issues of acknowledging or recognizing skills and abilities acquired before coming to Canada.

It is one thing to tell a family-class immigrant to take on physically demanding job opportunities because he does not have the desired language or professional skills. It is totally different to push a medical doctor or an engineer into janitorial or similar low-skilled jobs. I know a few people who are driving cabs at this time, or they are delivering pizzas.

The current practice not only demolishes well-educated newcomers' self-esteem and confidence, but also denies society and the workplace the benefit of the valuable skills brought to Canada by such people. In the prevailing economic environment, on one side we are experiencing acute shortages of skills and trades, while at the same time we refuse to acknowledge and accept skills and abilities brought here by new Canadians.

Canada's economy is unable to realize its full growth potential due to its very small population. The indigenous population growth is so anemic that it does not meet the minimum replacement needs. Add to that an aging population, improving life expectancy, growing socio-economic expectations, accelerating technological demands, both the life-sustaining and quality-of-life aspects, and we begin to get a glimpse of the challenges on a national scale.

Practically all European and South Asian economies are trying hard to avoid any serious erosions of their workforce. In such circumstances, Canada must consider itself extremely fortunate to be able to attract young, qualified, hard-working and desirable new members from various parts of the world. There is, however, no justification in destroying new Canadians' self-worth and self-esteem by telling them that their life's achievements in an educational, industrial, economic, and social sense are totally worthless.

We need new immigrants, and we'll continue to need them in the foreseeable future. Canada's economic and political survival depends on that. We need to keep our doors open and not place arbitrary barriers to their becoming fully productive partners in Canada's growth and development.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next we've got Ms. Colak.

Oh, sorry....

**Mr. Sital Nanuan:** I would like to make a few comments for the honourable member who was talking about the universities.

At this time in Canada we almost have a three-tiered system. The first ones are the old universities that are well established, like the University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, Western, and McGill. Then we have the new universities like the University of Calgary, or maybe some other universities that are new but they don't have the same kind of reputation. They do have lots of money, there's a lot of research work going on, but they're not fully established. Then we have all the universities in the smaller provinces that don't have too much population, like Lakehead University in Ontario, where no one wants to go. And then there are the schools with even less... [*Inaudible—Editor*]. It's the same kind of system in the third world countries: tier one, tier two, or tier three. When they come here, even from tier one universities, they are not recognized.

Lastly, look at any hydrocarbon magazine that is published in the U.S. Those are the power publications in relation to the power plants. One-third of the articles are published by students who go to those universities, and we are unable to recognize them. So that's the fast track from those schools, and they cannot get jobs here. I would suggest the federal or provincial governments give incentives to these companies to accept them and offer them a job. Then within three or four months' time they will be fully productive workers.

If anybody has any questions, I can talk about the universities or a worthy profession.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'll touch on the universities, hopefully.

Ms. Colak.

**Mrs. Alice Colak (Director, Immigration and Settlement Service, Catholic Social Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Alice Colak, and with my colleague, Heather Plaizier, we're going to make the presentation on behalf of Catholic Social Services.

Catholic Social Services, among other services, provides settlement support for newcomers, immigrants, and refugees. We are in the privileged position of having to work with newcomers when they first arrive in Canada, when they're full of optimism and hope and life is going to be grand. That's our initial point of contact, providing information about some of the issues that have already been mentioned, about education, about working, about health, and so on—all aspects about living and making productive lives in Canada. However, shortly after this stage, the reality sets in and there is frustration and other things that I'm sure you have heard about.

One of the other services that we provide is that we are a centralized point of language assessment in Edmonton. When newcomers first arrive and they're interested in pursuing English language training or determining their English skill assessment, they come to our program. We're that important initial contact of services, career counselling, educational counselling, and so on.

Maybe I'll stop there. We've been in the business for more than 40 years, so our observations are grounded in front-line delivery. The observations and the barriers that I'm sure you have heard about are not going to be new, but we're going to spend a few minutes and go over them.

**Ms. Heather Plaizier (Catholic Social Services):** Hello, my name's Heather.

Just to follow up on what Alice said, we do specialize in language assessment for the municipality of Edmonton. As much as possible, we try to ensure that the clients who come to see us have some kind of plan, and do some initial steps in looking at their careers. However, we're not resourced to do that as effectively and comprehensively as we would like, and it's only the beginning stages. We can only do the beginning piece to help people move on to possibly a bridging program, possibly a job placement, possibly ESL—whatever their options are, based on that first assessment from us, which is only language.

Our main recommendation, which is almost identical to what Ralph pointed out, is to have more comprehensive career process support for clients when they come to the city. Then not only language but the skills gaps for their professions will be assessed initially. There's a whole process of skills gap identification that is being worked on by all the different professions, and that needs to be perfected. In the meantime, while that process is happening we still need to be supporting people to go as far as they can according to the resources we have right now. We need to follow people through their career process, and make sure they have the right information and get to the right professional associations. We need to support them and have some follow-through and follow-up.

One of the most advantageous things for clients is to have somebody call them two or three months later. Our mandate is that after three to four weeks we call to see how those steps are going. To have somebody who's able to and mandated to check in with them over a period of two or three years while they make those steps would be invaluable.

Another of the initial barriers is funding access—not having access to the funds they need just to pay for their professional exams, and not being able to access ESL programs. In our province, if you're attached to the labour market you're not eligible for any skills investment kinds of programs. So that's one of the funding barriers.

I know that in the programs the Mennonite Centre offers they've found ways to skirt that difficulty and have people accepted and given permission to leave employment in order to access some of the bridging programs, but that's not standard. The standard is if you've got a job in Alberta, you're basically on your own.

There's also a funding barrier with student loans. People often go through the system as far as they can and find out they have no choice but to go back and redo all their credentials. There's a residency requirement of one year before they can access a full student loan in Alberta. They can get a Canada student loan, but that doesn't have enough living expenses to support their families. There's a waiting period to get a student loan to be able to go back to start getting the credentials they already have, to a large extent. Meanwhile, these people have children who are in the school system, and they're trying to save for them to go back to school. So these barriers are multiplied very unnecessarily.

On another main barrier, we need to assist people in identifying specific gaps, rather than saying "Well, you didn't pass the exam, so go back and do the whole thing". There are resources in the country that are building to help professional associations and employers start to be able to identify those gaps more clearly so we have the tools to build bridging programs that are effective and time-effective.

• (1555)

Also, we do have clients we've worked with who do end up getting into their professions, not necessarily medicine and so on, but getting into the profession isn't always the answer because they may lose the job because of misunderstandings about what it means to have that profession. What is it to be a supervisory journeyman or electrician or engineer in this country? The expectations can be very different based on just the cultural assumptions. We've seen people who've jumped through all those hoops and then lost their employment.

Do you want to add anything?

**Mrs. Alice Colak:** I think it's already been said that there's a need for more mentorship programs and internship programs. We hope the employers, the business sector, would take the incentive and have the courage to employ more newcomers, to take a chance on them.

**The Chair:** Thank you. You're a minute over now.

Ms. McLeod.

**Ms. Genai McLeod (Program Liaison Officer, Centre for Foreign Trained Professionals, Bredin Institute - Centre for Learning):** Thank you very much, honourable chair, members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, and other members of the panel and committee.

Rather than read through my brief in its entirety, I just wanted to touch on some of the realities of the plight of the internationally trained professionals at our centre. Over the last few months we've become very well aware of the cognizance of the tremendous role of all the stakeholders. That includes industry, the associations, agencies serving immigrants, language benchmarking, and other supports and services that are available.

While there are many barriers, many of which have been mentioned throughout the day, there are four key ones that we

continually find over and over again: the lack of Canadian experience; the contention that these candidates are overqualified for the positions for which they are applying; a concern in regard to their occupational language proficiency; and, if they're in a regulated profession, obviously the licensure through the various associations is of concern.

We do not profess to be experts in all professions and associations; however, we do make reference quite often to outsourcing, things like the IQAS, as was mentioned in the brief, for determining international qualifications assessments. However, to be perfectly honest, some associations do not support the IQAS, and hence there's a conflict.

The second affiliation that we often go through is the affiliated association body, and we benchmark our candidates based on what their professional expertise is based on their cohesive identity within the profession and their years of experience.

It is interesting in Canada that we benchmark a lot of an individual's professional success on his or her essential skills more so than on the technical skills. And while individuals might have international proficiency on a technical level and have influence and authority in their home countries, what we tend to do is suggest that in addition to those technical skills—and by the way, it would be helpful to have them assessed in a way that was Canadian-based and recognized—they have the provisions, as mentioned earlier, to succeed in the Canadian corporate culture.

Industry is also struggling with this. It tends to go with what is familiar. If it's through the association, then that is fine. If it's through reference of a peer, then that is fine. If it's unknown, the individual typically has a lot more challenges to go through.

One of the comparisons that has been made by the peers and colleagues I've had the privilege of working with through our client base is that the question is often asked, why isn't there a one-point source of screening for benchmarking the base qualifications for all professions? And the equivalent for this could be taken from our neighbours to the south in regard to the WES. This is also included in the brief. This merits some consideration from my perspective, because certainly it would streamline the proficiency of evaluating an individual's success in his or her profession, thereby also reducing the delay or the wait time for the individual's success.

Finally, the feedback from the professionals I have the privilege of working with is that they no longer necessarily desire further academic training. If their technical competencies are lacking, then certainly there's a need for that. However, typically what they're suggesting to me is that they would really just like to have more of the Canadian exposure. Not only would that give them the insight into the social norms and accepted policies and procedures that we implement, but it would also provide the opportunity for the licensure process—and the reference I made in the brief was to the engineering group, which I'm very familiar with, and its plight in regard to APEGGA.

In conclusion, there are many contributing factors to the continued success of immigrant professionals while in Canada. Essential skills, technical skills, experience, education, and affiliation through a licensing body are vital. This is also complemented by the apparent gaps in skilled professions within the labour market. However, newcomers to Canada state that the current model of support is confusing and frustrating as they compete with all streams of the employable workforce. A single source may provide a structure of guidance and support at a point of entry to meet this need. Mention was made of the portal, the consideration of integration. It is an interesting initiative. With the support of industry and licensing bodies, perhaps a benchmark could be established whereby we are able to accept international skills and experience as they meet the Canadian requirements.

Thank you for your time.

•(1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I was just reflecting while I was listening. When you look around the committee table, many of us came from elsewhere. The ones who were born here....When Mr. Siksay came to the country, they changed his name. They took away the z, which used to be a common practice.

The reason I mention that is we all have a great deal of empathy for the problems. Anyway, we're hoping this thing will end up in some solutions, then we'll have to build on it. It's a difficult problem, as mentioned before, given the nature of our federation.

I'm going to start again with Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for your presentations. We appreciate your patience. I know some of you have been here all day listening to various witnesses who have presented.

We find the information really useful. I'm going to do my best to try to ask as many questions as I can in the short time we have.

Ms. Nielsen, on the area of the long-term-care providers, are these mostly health care professionals, the different sorts of levels, who provide this service for long-term care?

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** There are 80% of our workers who are non-professional. They're supervised by registered nurses or other professionals.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Is there still a trend with some of the professionals, even the ones who are not...? Are there more

opportunities south of the border? I know in different health professions and at different times we had a loss of a lot of our talent. That's even led to some of the skills shortage here. Do you still see that trend overall, or have things levelled out? Is this why we do have the shortage we need to look for here?

•(1605)

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** Actually, I have seen it levelled out. The registered nurses in long-term care are difficult to hire; particularly in the rural areas they're just not there. We do foresee a future shortage of registered nurses.

So now, in order to overcome that, the Province of Alberta has extended its scope of practice for licensed practical nurses. So we see now the trend in long-term care changing to hire more licensed practical nurses. The RNs are now becoming more nurse practitioners. The training for those who do all the health care aid is expanding as well.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Okay.

My next question may need to be addressed by the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and the Catholic Social Services. It seems to me we've seen the constant concern, or I guess you both called it the "skills gap", the problems in trying to address some of the immigrants' needs or professionals' needs, whatever they might need when they come here and they're going through a process. I believe you called it a "soft skills gap", and how we need to provide for that.

It seems to me from what I'm learning, going through this process, that a number of the services are funded often through provincial channels, and then there are some that might be funded federally, although that might be just in the realm of language training. I'm not sure how much more outside of that.

Because there's often so much missing in that support to people coming here, and your organizations are picking up a lot of that, would there be some value in trying to evaluate that sort of support—or maybe it's already happening, but I'm not aware it is—in seeing how the federal government can maybe take some leadership in coordinating some of that support? You called for more resources or funding. It seems to me that it's somewhat piecemeal as you go from province to province, depending on who's picking up the slack, on which organization is providing the services.

I don't know if I'm on the right track here or not. Maybe I'll leave it to you to guide us in that capacity and see how we could do that. Maybe the Bredin Institute has a comment on that. I'm not sure. I'll leave it to you to just see if I'm on the right track here or not.

**Mr. Ralph Paufler:** There's certainly occasion for the federal government to take a leadership role in coordinating the full range of services. One of the clearest things that comes to you once you've worked in this field long enough is that people don't have just one need when they come here, they have many needs, and all those needs need to be addressed in some way. Immigrants themselves tell us there's a preference not to have to visit six stores to serve your needs. So it's sort of a holistic, comprehensive approach.

What the federal government can do in terms of leadership is look at what some of the best practices are, look at what's happening now, and channel dollars into best-practice initiatives that get people working at a good level, with good remuneration and opportunity for professional recognition.

We know the provinces have responsibility for licensing in the various professions, but federal initiative to look at a model.... The technologists association in Alberta has developed a prior-learning recognition model based on national standards that are recognized from province to province. They've taken those standards and developed a tool that looks at the skills of an internationally educated professional and says you seem to have most of the skills required to be considered a civil engineering technologist or mechanical engineering technologist and so forth. That was done from a national perspective.

If the other regulatory bodies could take a similar approach to looking at what the common things are.... Because there's not a whole lot of difference between being a physician in B.C. and being a physician in Newfoundland—other than climate, maybe. So the federal initiative I think will be to put pressure in that direction and then coordinate it, look for best practices that take a fast approach, not duplicating previous education and previous skills, but getting people working. And then from a position of strength, with all the different parties working together, we can leverage professional recognition and credential recognition.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Did you have any comment on that or about the question?

**Ms. Heather Plaizier:** Yes, I would agree with all of that, and the career services covering all those aspects of helping people get into the workforce in a relevant field. Well, this would touch on best practices. But then you need to get all of the appropriate assessments done and move from there with them, have good follow-up, intercultural support follow-up and that kind of thing, working with the municipalities too. But the lead could come from the federal, sure.

•(1610)

**The Chair:** Madam Faille.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** I find interesting that the panel that we have in front of us is raising the issue of the follow-up. In Quebec, we have a culture of networking that allows us to cover the whole territory of the province. That is one of our strengths. This enables us to do some harmonization, to ensure some consistency of services all around the province. As well, our approach is more focussed on social services and on a greater involvement of non-profit and community organizations.

It seems that Ms. Colak did not have enough time and I would like to give her some more time in order to explore this avenue, considering the fact that we presently have some very meaningful results and that a very strong link is being established and that we are having a good rate of success with businesses. It seems that businesses are willing to hire more and more immigrants. Some basic academic skills and credentials are required. For most jobs, they are looking for people who have some general knowledge. The requirements will not be the same for a plumber and for an engineer. I would like to give you a little bit more time to continue your exploration about the necessary follow-up, what we could call “the after sales service”.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Alice Colak:** Thank you.

I regret, I cannot answer you in French, so I will have to speak in English. English is also my second language, but many of us here have been newcomers to this country at some stage.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Me too.

**Mrs. Alice Colak:** A lot of the services that are provided are high-volume services. We tend to process an awful lot of people really quickly. We need to take a much more personalized, professional approach. It would alter very much how organizations are funded, how much funding is provided, and so on. This approach takes a lot more time; it would be very labour intensive. But the outcomes would be much more positive for the the newcomers, the employer, and the society. We're losing a lot by not using the talents and skills of newcomers.

My other point is that the career counselling, the educational support, should come not concurrently with a credential assessment, but rather, fairly quickly after arrival. We find that if this occurs months or years later, people get lost in the system. They get frustrated, and all kinds of losses occur.

So those are a couple points that we wanted to make: the need for professional, longer-term follow-up, both with the individuals and also with the employers; and the need to provide early intercultural communication support with the employers.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I want to thank Mr. Okelu for reminding us of the Agreement on Internal Trade. That's a helpful reminder, and I want to look more at it myself.

Mr. Nanuan, the strong language that you used is not lost on me—the demolishing of self-esteem, the achievements of one's life being rendered worthless. It's very strong, but I understand where you're coming from.

We had an example yesterday in Calgary from an engineering professor who said that a lot of the call centres that deliver technical information are in fact in India, and Canadian engineers or other technical experts are calling India for help on programs. But the people they're getting that help from they wouldn't employ here in Canada because they wouldn't recognize their training or their accreditation. This is rather ironic.

We always hear this Canadian-experience discussion. I'm still extremely suspicious of that. What's the proof that a lack of Canadian experience is detrimental to the workforce? Have there been studies showing that people without Canadian experience destroy a workplace? Are there companies that fell apart because they had too many people without Canadian experience?

Perhaps my experience is a little more limited, but I regularly have interns from Britain and Ukraine in my office. They come with a certain skill level that has enriched the office, because they have a different perspective. They have no Canadian experience, but certain basic skills and interests have made them a valuable asset in the office, almost to a person, and that's over many years in a political and a parliamentary context.

Is there documentation about the value of Canadian experience, or the harm in not having it?

• (1615)

**Mr. Ralph Paufler:** If you don't mind, I'll start with that one, and some of my fellow visitors can help out a bit.

I think it was mentioned earlier that one of the key factors here is one of familiarity. If there's a choice, you choose the familiar. What Canada is facing now, though, in Alberta and in the rest of Canada over the next few years, is a severe shortage of the familiar. So immigrants are starting to look more attractive.

What Canadian experience will do is the same thing a first job experience will do for a young person. It will demonstrate work attitude, ethics, the ability to show up for work every day—those kinds of very fundamental things.

So any initiatives that can open industry doors to give more opportunities—whether they're through internships, through mentorships, through work experience placements—are only going to help the situation.

Large industries don't want the paperwork that's involved on the financial side of getting wage subsidies or wage enhancements and so forth. Smaller companies can benefit from them. A role that the federal government can play here is to better organize, very much like the city of Toronto did under the TRIEC model, and help the provinces, help the centres that are trying to attract immigrants, to get organized—with industry in particular, and with organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Manufacturers Association—to get employers lined up and ready to accept the unfamiliar.

You can be trained in any country. The skill set is very often very similar. There is some bridging sometimes needed—some technical bridging, some language bridging, some Canadian cultural bridging—but the best place for that to happen, obviously, is in the workplace.

Right now we do bridging programs because what the bridging programs do successfully for us here in Alberta is, first of all, put a Canadian stamp on the person's credentials, because we're associated with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, which is a very high-profile school. It puts a regulatory-body stamp on them from the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists. So immediately

that person is a bit more familiar, plus their communication skills are improved.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Can I interrupt for one second? Are we doing it backwards? Should we have bridging programs for employers, rather than for the new immigrants? Is that where the problem is? Or is it with the new immigrants' background and training?

**Mr. Ralph Paufler:** Both.

**Ms. Heather Plaizier:** As you've said, you've had very positive experiences with the enrichment that hiring people from other countries' cultures can bring into a workforce. But there has to be a will, and I think there have to be some realistic expectations of the work that goes with that, too, to broaden perspectives of what our understanding is. In that sense, yes, I think bridging programs are needed for employers in this country to get a better sense that you can't just hire the person and she'll do the job exactly as you expect someone might do that job. They might have a different angle or take or way of communicating.

**Ms. Genai McLeod:** This might put me in a minority, but I was born and raised on a farm in Alberta. I think one of my realizations was that there is a unique Canadian identity within the Canadian corporate culture that I have taken for granted. And while some employers have really been supportive of moving forward with diversity and enhancement through this international opportunity by accessing these professionals—RBC would be one in the Toronto area, through TRIEC, and B.C. Hydro is another fantastic organization that has implemented some really good work-experience programs—there is a mindset that's still out there. Whether it's through the associations or industry, it's still there.

I was interested myself. So I looked, and the *Toronto Star*, in a November edition, presented a survey of more than 2,000 employees and stated that foreign experience doesn't measure up. It continues to explore why it doesn't measure up. I'm not suggesting I validate it, but I think there is a recognition that there's an integration that must occur.

We put a lot of emphasis on doctors, nurses, and engineers, but there are also lawyers, accountants, and teachers. Recently one of my teachers said, "Your education system here is really different". That's a good insight into what might need to be bridged. And maybe it does need to come from the employer.

• (1620)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Siksay.

Dr. Fry.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you.

I'm glad we got onto the Canadian experience piece, because I think you explained it very well. For instance, the Canadian health care system works in a very different way. A pharmacist in many other countries actually compounds drugs and then fills out prescriptions. Here in Canada, many pharmacists are now primary care providers. You walk into a pharmacy and you ask them what to do about something that's wrong with you. Many people have never had to do that with a person, one on one, before; it's never been their training.

I've heard from the unions that even with something as simple as truck drivers who have the licence to drive in another country and come here and simply cannot drive in snow-covered hilly country, because they've never driven in snow before—simple things, which require in some instances.... A British Columbian could not come and drive in Calgary, let me tell you.

Some of them require short periods of bridging; some of them require longer periods of bridging, depending on what you see. The “Canadian experience” piece is a huge piece that keeps coming back, and back again, from employers. Many of them say it has to do with Canadians' expectations of what they require in a piece of goods or in a service. The expectations of Canadians for service is very different from those in other places.

The federal government has a role to play, as Ralph said, and we have already begun to do the pan-Canadian assessment models with regulatory bodies that are ready. The doctors are developing one now, and we're working with the nurses on one, etc. But the experience is a piece for which many private-sector employers, especially small and medium-sized ones, do not have the resources to do the on-the-job, experiential training, because they're small. The big companies are doing great best practices. McCain Foods and Palliser and all these are doing really great jobs—and you said RBC, etc. But the small and medium-sized ones who hire the bulk of people have a huge problem.

We have bridging money and bridging programs, but we still can't bridge with some of those because they don't want to have access, because they don't think they have the human resource potential within their own system to do it.

Do you have some solutions?

**Ms. Genai McLeod:** Assuming I understand the question correctly, when we're looking at SMEs or small and medium-size employers, I think certainly resources—financial, perhaps, in this case—would be a lucrative option to enhance trying it out. A lot of my relationship with employers has been in building trust. A lot of our successes have been through the relationship each individual staff person on our team has with the collective employer base we work with.

If we could have access to a resource that made it just a little bit more lucrative, I think we would have a higher return on our investment, because once one success gets out there, word of mouth will mandate through the smaller associations that this is maybe a very good, competitive edge.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Some small businesses have said even a tax credit isn't going to make a difference for them, because they just can't do it. Do you see a role for somebody in organizations such as

yours, Ralph, who can bridge this, who can do the human resource piece for them?

• (1625)

**Mr. Ralph Paufler:** Yes. There's a very exciting new application of an old technology that's happening and is sweeping the country now; it swept America a couple of years ago. It's called “electronic portfolios”. Most of us who have been involved in any way with adult education understand the whole concept of portfolio development, which is a very rich description of your background, your experiences, your work history, and so forth.

We're working right now with a group that's trying to get some national federal-government funding to develop an e-portfolio system. The idea of using this technology with immigrant professionals is a gem. It's almost as if it was made for it. What you can do with an e-portfolio is describe your work experience, from whatever country it was. You can describe your education. You can have hyper-links on it—it's like a mini-website, almost—that go to your university and stack the courses you've taken up against University of Alberta courses, that go to your employer and show the projects you've worked on. All of a sudden your experiences become relevant to that employer.

This is really good for small employers. Suncor doesn't have time to start looking through an e-portfolio bank, but if I'm hiring two people a year from some technical field, I can visit this electronic portfolio bank and start browsing through for people who have those experiences. I find one, I look at the description, and see they've done exactly the same kind of things we're doing here. Maybe there are some language issues; maybe there is some cultural difference: these things we can bridge in the workplace. Let's get them working; let's get them here helping us.

We're really excited about the possibility of the e-portfolio as a bridge to the small and medium-sized employer.

**Ms. Heather Plaizier:** I would add just quickly that we have the connection between the newcomer and an employer. If that small to medium-sized business also knows that there are some supports available in terms of career counselling, mentoring for somebody who's in the field but not necessarily in the workplace, intercultural brokering, mediating, that kind of thing for problems that may arise, if they know those supports are accessible in the community, then I think that would also assist a lot.

**The Chair:** Madam Grewal.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your time and your presentations.

Mr. Nanuan was mentioning in his presentation that on one hand we have a skill shortage, and on the other hand we have doctors pumping gas and lawyers driving taxis. So what needs to be done?

**Mr. Sital Nanuan:** I would suggest the federal government or the provincial government is talking about the bridging, so they should give some incentives to the industry so that when they hire somebody, for the first two or three months they can train those people. That way it is not a burden on the industry and it's very easy for the newcomer to settle in and to get the job, because the biggest problem over here is when the person comes in and the industries are often part of the Canadian experience.

I used to say, two plus two is four everywhere, it doesn't matter where you go. You can go to India, you can go to China, you can even go to Colombia. Whatever country you go to, two plus two is always four. It's the same thing in Canada. Two plus two is always four.

So I'm a professional engineer and I can talk to you from this profession. In this profession we are governed by codes, like the American National Standards Institute, only now we are calling them ASME codes. So I agree, this is governed by those codes. In most of the countries they have all these codes, all the international standards, and then it's not very difficult for those engineers who have all the experience to come here and to start working, as long as the industry is willing to hire them.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Is there anyone else who would like to answer the same question?

**The Chair:** When I listen to the discussion I think about some of the experiences I have back in my riding. We have two universities. One is the University of Waterloo, the other one is Wilfrid Laurier. The other school is Conestoga College. Education is a fairly big part of the local economy and what we do as a region.

Given the fact that the universities are pretty autonomous institutions, as well as the college, we're having trouble getting them to do proper recognition of each other's credentials. This all falls under provincial jurisdiction, so there's a fair amount of waste that goes on. I often thought about that, because what's the purpose of not giving credit for what you take at the college, for going to university, and vice versa?

Everybody knows the University of Waterloo now, but at the time I went there it was many years ago and it was a lot easier getting into that university then than it would be if I wanted to get in there now. As you may know, they're the ones who invented co-op education, and when they did that it was a totally new concept and everybody thought they were heretics. I remember the University of London started up at the time.

Somehow we're not very good in this country at even recognizing the skills from the provincial institutions and transferring those skills back and forth. Really, our challenge in terms of a continuous learning society is that people have to continually be retrained. We have to get that right, because if we don't, we're going to miss out. We're dealing with an international economy. International experience is a tremendous asset and it's one of our strengths.

• (1630)

**Mr. Sital Nanuan:** In our profession right now in engineering, every year we have to put in about 80 hours of professional development. We have to read magazines and articles, and then give lectures on those particular topics.

As far as the University of Waterloo is concerned, in 1976 I took a course over there. So for about five years, I was at the University of Waterloo.

When I actually came from India, I was a graduate from Punjab University. Here in Canada, the universities were accepting at par. We were able to get admission to wherever we wanted. But the provincial associations were not accepting at par. That's where the problem was at that time. I think it's still the same. It has not changed.

They asked me to write four exams, and I did it in the first year. I didn't have any problem writing them. Then I took a course at the University of Toronto, and some more professional courses on Canadian law, economics, management, and those kinds of courses.

I am saying that the problem is in the associations. Previously, even though I was registered in Ontario, Alberta didn't want to accept me at that time. When I told them that I wasn't asking for a new registration, but I was asking only for a transfer, then they accepted it.

A cousin of mine is over here in EPCOR. He had one master's degree from Punjab University and then he got another one from the University of Saskatchewan. Again, the association asked him to write the TOEFL test.

That's what the problem is, and it is still going on. It has not stopped yet.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Singh, when you mentioned two plus two, it reminded me of the story of a father having two sons and a daughter. One son was an engineer, the other one was a lawyer, and the daughter was an accountant. He asked the engineer what two plus two was, and the engineer said that it was four. He asked his other son, who was the lawyer, what two plus two was, and the lawyer said that, of course, it was four. When he asked his daughter, the accountant, what two plus two was, she asked, "What do you want it to be?"

Sometimes it's more than credentials. You have to have a desire to do something more than what you have a paper for.

I wanted to ask Dianne this. She mentioned immigration officers abroad misleading applicants about the opportunities in Canada. Is that widespread?

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** I based my information on new immigrants in our class who were training to be nurses' aides or health care aides and had credentials from their countries. They indicated that they came in through the point system. The immigration officer had indicated that it would be no problem getting credentials anywhere in Canada once they learned the English language. Their source of information was from that immigration officer.

• (1635)

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** You also mentioned that professional associations are strict.

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** Yes, and they vary from province to province. I am a nurse, and I know that you have to register in each province. There's not always reciprocity in professions in each province, as you've heard. We certainly have seen that.

In our industry, particularly for long-term care, we are depending on new immigrants from the Philippines and Asian countries to help increase our workforce. We are seeing extremely well-trained people from those countries who speak the language fluently and are unable to obtain their credentials. Our association and the employers are pooling our resources to assist these people through agencies to help them receive their credentials.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** I know that you can't speak on behalf of the association, but you could maybe give us your opinion. Would the nurses be in favour of having a national association standard, where we'd take Alberta's standards and nationalize that? Would it be something that would make things easier for every new candidate who comes from outside to get credentials if you only had to go to one body?

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** That would be excellent.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Would the association be supportive of that?

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** Our association would. I believe the AARNs who are represented here are working toward that end. Years ago Canadian nurses could practise nursing anywhere without having to be re-credentialed.

The exams we wrote were American exams. We'd go to the States. Now I'm not so familiar with that process. Certainly people in our association, when we are looking at recruiting, would find that very excellent.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** How about engineers?

**Mr. Sital Nanuan:** Yes, we have the CCPE.

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** The college has, as well, a doctors'....

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** No, they're working on one. They don't have one.

**Ms. Dianne Nielsen:** Oh. I thought they had a national exam.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** They have a national exam, but not national credentialing.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ralph Pauffer:** Can I just comment on that quickly?

One of the confusing elements for a lot of immigrants is that the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers is the organization that evaluates their credentials when they apply to immigrate and awards

the points that go into the immigration application. It's not easy to see somebody then stretching that to the point of, well, if the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers recognizes me as an engineer, it's a cakewalk.

There is a lot of wishful thinking involved. I hear from so many skilled immigrants that they were misled, whether it's deliberate or accidental because they were not provided enough information. Sometimes the wishful thinking is a significant development. It's things like that which create the confusion and add to the confusion for a lot of people.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I guess one of the things that we take from everything here is that the more we can get the information out there, and the more we can make sure that when they say they want to come to Canada they have as many facts as possible, and the more we direct them on that, the better.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** There was an interesting thing that everybody might like to think about. Statistics Canada did a post-census survey on why immigrants came to Canada, especially ones who had complained of not being hired in their professions. The first reason was not just to find a job. In Vancouver, the first reason was climate, the second reason was lifestyle, the third reason was family, and the fourth reason was job. In Quebec, the first reason was language, the second reason was lifestyle, the third reason was family, and the fourth reason was to find a job. In Toronto, finding a job was the second reason after family.

So people come for various reasons. Nothing is black and white. People are complex beings. You come for something. Many people who come as primary immigrants, who have found a job and are working, quite often, if they have post-secondary education, bring with them a spouse, and kids who are 22 or 21, who also have post-secondary education. They didn't come as the primary immigrants. So now they're looking for work. I think many of them say they're told, "Oh yes, we need doctors in Canada, so if you go with your parent you can find work".

It's a complex issue.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much. It's very much appreciated.

I'm going to call on Rahim Jaffer. He's a member of our standing committee. We're in his community. I'd like to give him a chance to wrap things up.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all our witnesses here today. As I said, I noticed some of you have been here at different times during the day, listening in. We appreciate the patience you've had and the time you've taken to make such excellent presentations.

I was glad the chair gave me a chance to wind things up, because it is really nice to have the standing committee here in Edmonton, listening to many of the concerns of many Edmontonians. We did hear many different issues, as well as many great suggestions that as you all are aware will be included in this report once the standing committee finishes up. We're continuing on with consultations over the next couple of weeks. Once a report is done, we'll make sure you get a copy of that report, and we look forward to sharing that with the House of Commons as well.

Once again, I want to thank all my colleagues, also, for taking the time to be here. We know the schedule's been such a tight one. We wish you could have enjoyed a little bit of Edmonton. Seeing that you came in at 9 o'clock last night or 9:30 or so, we didn't have a lot of time this time. So hopefully the next time we'll be able to entertain you.

Thank you once again to everyone.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're concluded. Thank you.

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