



ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ
ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ
PAUKTUUTIT
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

MEDIA ADVISORY

Inuit Midwifery and Birthing Practices

October 16, 2006, Ottawa – immediate. Pauktuutit President Martha Greig today announced the release of seventy-seven historical interviews, describing 516 births, conducted in the early 1990s with Inuit about their birthing experiences over the last several generations.

The interviews are recorded oral narratives of Inuit women, many of them Elders, detailing the birthing histories of women living across Canada's Arctic. They contain the wisdom, skills, and knowledge of a generation who first gave birth on the land, then later in community nursing stations, and most recently in regional and southern hospitals. The Elders describe what it was like to grow up on the land, their pregnancies, their childbirths, and their experiences as midwives.

This is a unique body of knowledge that most certainly can never be duplicated again. Martha Greig commented, *“Though I am now Pauktuutit’s president, at the time of the project I was Health Coordinator, and was the one who conducted many of the interviews.”*

Since Pauktuutit’s inception, Inuit women have been concerned about the displacement of Inuit midwives, the loss of knowledge and the loss of community-based birthing. There is routine evacuation of expectant mothers from their communities to southern hospitals located hundreds of miles from home. Ms. Greig added, *“It is well documented that the legacy of this evacuation has not been in the best interest of Inuit women, our families, or our cultural heritage.”*

Today's Elders are among the last generation of Inuit to have experienced giving birth on the land with the assistance of midwives and family members. Their skill and knowledge are no longer being passed on to younger women. Yet many modern practitioners working in the North are not sensitive to Inuit culture or to Inuit birthing preferences.

With this in mind, Pauktuutit embarked on the project: *Documentation of Traditional Practices Related to Pregnancy and Childbirth*. The intent of this participatory research project was to gather the elder’s knowledge before it was too late and to use it to support community-based birthing centres and to promote greater cultural sensitivity to Inuit preferences.

Pauktuutit collected the original traditional information some years ago, but has only recently found financial support to allow us to conduct a more thorough analysis and to begin working to develop practical tools that will benefit Inuit obstetrics.

The availability of trained Inuit midwives in the north is limited, as are midwives with knowledge of Inuit birthing techniques. More Inuit must be trained within the health care profession and encouraged to become midwives. This will help reduce northern staff turnover, the problems of staff retention, and reduce the overall cost of health care delivery.

Pauktuutit has submitted a comprehensive and important **project proposal** to Health Canada, to support the training of Inuit midwives and to sensitize northern health professionals about traditional Inuit practices, as it is important that governments acknowledge and support this training and that hospitals respect acknowledge the experience of Inuit midwives.

In addition, Pauktuutit hopes to engage in knowledge transfer that promotes the rich cultural heritage of Inuit pregnancy and birthing and that encourages young women to learn from their Elders – including materials directed to young women and young mothers, to promote a healthy lifestyle and healthy diets. We also envision short radio spots that will use excerpts from the original audio recordings. These can be locally specific — using dialects — and will promote ‘*lessons from your grandmother*’ and other anecdotal accounts that foster healthy pregnancies within Inuit cultural heritage.

Pauktuutit originally sent the interviews to participants in tape recordings, however Pauktuutit felt that releasing the material on modern CDs will ensure its survival, and also perhaps generate new discussion and support around this irreplaceable traditional knowledge.

-30-

Pauktuutit contacts
Martha Grieg, President
819 964 2549

Jennifer Dickson, Executive Director
613 238 3977 ext 226