

# Inuit infant death rate disputed

OTTAWA—A study which shows Inuit babies die at five times the national rate is "out of date and inaccurate," says Michael Amarook, President of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada.

"It gives a very false idea about health care for Inuit, and the quality of their health. Also, the study is based on data gathered nearly six years ago," Mr. Amarook says.

The joint study prepared by National Health and Welfare and co-authored by Dr. Donald Spady of the University of Alberta, blames cultural change as the main culprit for poor Inuit infant health. But it also says a main cause is that Inuit mothers reduced breast feeding to "imitate the whites." The Spady study ruled out inadequate medical care as a factor in poor infant health. Mr. Amarook maintains that poor medical services is a crucial factor in that Health and Welfare officials used to urge Inuit mothers not to breast feed

their babies.

"I was an interpreter in the sixties for the nurses and doctors who came to my community of Baker Lake. That's what they told the Inuit to do. Inuit mothers weren't imitating the whites by choice; the government used to say that unless we learned to do things the southern way, we had no future."

Inadequate medical care is considered to be one factor explaining the poor Inuit infant health.

"ITC met with Health and Welfare officials just last month to discuss guidelines for a possible study of health care services in the Keewatin region of Nunavut," Mr. Amarook says. "One of the factors that will be examined is the adequacy of health care delivery, and its rela-

tionship to the quality of health in Keewatin."

The Keewatin study, still in the planning stages, was NHW's response to the ITC President's call last November for a full inquiry into Inuit health care services in Nunavut.

"In a region such as the Keewatin where there are about 5,000 people, there is not one doctor and the closest hospital is 400 air miles away in Churchill, Manitoba. Weather conditions in the Arctic often cause lengthy delays in times of emergency," Mr. Amarook says. "The only way Inuit living in the Keewatin can see a doctor is to fly to Churchill or wait for one to come to their community. Without doctors, the nurses must shoulder responsibilities and make decisions that

are carried out by doctors in other parts of Canada. How

can this be called satisfactory health care?"