

THE STATE OF REGISTERED NURSING IN THE YUKON

April 2008

"No one goes through life untouched by nurses. They are there to cradle us at birth, care for us when we are sick or injured, and offer comfort at death"
André Picard

This year's Nursing Week theme is *"Think you know nursing? Take a closer look!"* This is an opportunity to highlight the surprising variety and breadth of roles held by Canadian nurses. Here in the Yukon, we see registered nurses in every facet of Yukon life: in the home, in acute and long term care facilities, in the sky, on the street and in the halls of policy and power. Yet, nurses continue to touch us most through caring, empathy and humour.

Yukon registered nurses represent 75% of the territorial health workforce. Forces that shape nursing shape our systems and communities.

The Yukon Registered Nurses Association (YRNA) is the regulatory body of the registered nurse profession, the only fully self-regulating health profession in the territory. YRNA embodies each registered nurse's responsibility and privilege to regulate the practice of nursing.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE YUKON REGISTERED NURSE WORKFORCE

- As of late April 2008, Yukon has just over 300 Active Practising Registered Nurses and this number will increase over the membership year. Active Practising membership for all of 2007 was 360.
- Of those registered in 2007: 57.5% of Active Practising RNs were over the age of 45. Less than 10% were under the age of 30.
- The number of Yukon nurses working in part time employment is well above the national average. More concerning still, our nurses are employed in casual or on-call positions at two and a half times the average in the rest of Canada.
- Yukon RNs are fairly evenly divided between hospital and community based settings such as public health, outreach van, home care, communicable disease control, community health centres and First Nations health. Yukon RNs are also employed in health policy and education.
- We have a higher than average percentage of male nurses, and we consistently have a higher percentage of nurses with Bachelors and Masters education.
- We are recruiting a higher number of new graduates than ever before, most of whom were able to experience Yukon nursing through practicum rotations in our care facilities while still in school.

THE YUKON RN REALITY: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Sustaining the RN workforce

- Registered nurses increasingly report significant challenges related to workload and staffing levels. In all health services, they see patient safety compromised when care is provided by nurses suffering fatigue caused by extended work hours and extra shifts. The theme of this year's AGM: *Stand up for Safe Care* will focus on solutions and questions that must be addressed to protect the public.
- YRNA will continue to advocate for staffing levels and hiring policies that reflect the ongoing shortage of health professionals. All parties must engage in this dialogue: government policy makers, managers at all levels of all services, front line nurses and human resource personnel.

- Sustainable solutions to the nursing shortage must involve Canada-wide strategies, including increased nursing education seats, conversion of casual positions to permanent and improved quality of the work environment.
- Together with the rest of the Canadian nursing community, YRNA does not support the active recruitment of nurses from other countries which cannot afford to lose them. However, we do have a significant number of internationally educated nurses enquiring about registration. The Association has been involved in a number of projects to support these nurses, and has received funding from the Yukon Government to support registration and integration of international nurses.
- YRNA recently signed a revised Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) with the other registered nurse regulatory bodies in Canada. The MRA removes barriers to professional mobility between provinces and territories

Healthy Public Policy

- Nursing has continued to work with a number of other Yukon health professions and the Yukon Government to build the Collaborative Practice model of care into our system and our mindset. A government planning group to move this work forward is in the process of being established.

Nursing Practice

- Soon, we will join other Canadian jurisdictions as we implement the nurse practitioner role in our territory. The regulatory framework to support this level of practice requires significant redrafting of the *Registered Nurses Professions Act*, a process that has taken several years. This spring will see formal consultation on the new draft legislation. Work now begins on the rewriting of the Regulations.
- YRNA has much work ahead, as it leads the way in the development and implementation of nurse practitioner roles in the Yukon setting. Employers, nurses, other health professions, government and the public will be partners as we move ahead with that challenge.
- YRNA is currently developing a Continuing Competence Program in fulfillment of our role to promote good nursing practice in the interest of the public. The initial launch of this program will be voluntary in 2009 and become mandatory in 2010.

Some Good News Highlights

- Yukon RNs continue to seek continuing education in impressive numbers. Education funding administered by YRNA and provided through a contribution agreement with Yukon Health and Social Services has enabled Yukon RNs to engage in more than 700 education initiatives to date – from one day workshops to full Nurse Practitioner Masters programs
- The Yukon Government has initiated a Nurse Mentorship Program. This program will be run in a variety of health care agencies and will support newly qualified nurses and experienced nurses who wish to make a move to a new area of health care. Given the interest in working in the Yukon among new graduates, this is a welcome development.

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