

Milestone Study Seeks Long-term Solution to Canada's Nursing Crisis

Nursing shortages are nothing new, in Canada or internationally. What is new is that the current shortage won't be solved by short-term solutions that may have worked before. Healthcare downsizing, cutbacks in education, inadequate human resources planning, and an aging workforce are some of the factors turning shortage into crisis.

To implement a lasting solution to the problem, decision-makers need comprehensive information about nursing human resources in this country, as well as strategy options that have the support of all nursing stakeholders.

Building the Future: an integrated strategy for nursing human resources in Canada is working to fulfill this need.

Overseen by a national multi-stakeholder steering committee, the study's goal is to develop an integrated labour market strategy for Canada's Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Registered Nurses (RNs), and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs). It is the first national nursing study led by the country's nursing stakeholder groups, which include professional nursing organizations, unions, employers, researchers, educators, physicians, provincial and territorial governments, and the Government of Canada.

Scheduled for completion later this year, the first phase of *Building the Future* involves gathering information about all aspects of nurses' work environment. The Nursing Effectiveness, Utilization and Outcomes Research Unit (NRU) is leading this phase, headed by Dr. Linda O'Brien-Pallas at the University of Toronto.

Last fall, the research team asked more than 40,000 randomly selected LPNs, RNs, and RPNs across Canada to participate in a comprehensive survey about their workplaces, their health, their patients, job satisfaction, and career paths. The team also surveyed 550 senior nurse managers, and is asking Canadian nursing schools to provide information about their current and future capacity.

The research team's first report, released March 4, 2004, examines the international nursing labour market. "It points out that shortages and supply problems characterize the market worldwide," says Dr. Linda O'Brien-Pallas. "As a result, it calls for national and international planning and research in recruitment, retention, and other areas."

Another report, to be released later this spring, looks at the movement of nurses between jurisdictions to identify mobility patterns. Future reports will feature topics such as immigration and emigration trends and why students choose nursing as a career. A final report on all of the *Building the Future* research is planned for December 2004. Phase two of the study -- consultations with stakeholders to develop a long term strategy that address the research recommendations -- will begin soon afterwards.

"*Building the Future* is a milestone project," says Verna Holgate, *Building the Future* co-chair. "For the first time, all health care stakeholders are studying the three regulated nursing professions in all provinces and territories. The results will help governments, educators, and employers make decisions to ensure there are enough skilled nurses to meet Canadians' evolving health care needs."

"We must ensure that nurses and their employers are heard," says Mary Ellen Jeans, who also co-chairs *Building the Future*. "Their input is essential in arriving at workable, long-term solutions." For more information on *Building the Future*, and to view our research reports, please visit <http://www.buildingthefuture.ca>