

## **Quality of Care, not “Turf War”**

### **Editor:**

The PEI Nurses Union represents over 1200 registered nurses in PEI ó the single largest group of health care professionals in the province. Both the Union and its members are very aware that something needs to be done to address the current nursing shortage, which is resulting in significant workload issues. One of the primary roles of the Union is to represent our members' interests and work with the employer to create appropriate solutions to address these workload issues. These issues should concern all Islanders ó the users of the Health Care System and clients of nursing services - as much as they do the Registered Nurses providing these services.

The Provincial Government, through the Department of Health, has publicly acknowledged that it has embarked upon a new project ó the Integrated Health System Project. The results of this project will, in their view, attempt to address the nursing shortage, and the resulting workload issues for existing staff. Ironically and unfortunately, Government has prevented the Union from participating in the process which has resulted in the creation of a new "model of care" for the health system. We have learned through the Department's recent discussions with the press that the implementation of this new model of care will involve significant changes to the role of Registered Nurses in this province.

As President of the P.E.I. Nurses Union, I have vocalized and maintained a position that "front-line registered nurses" needed to be part of the development of any new "model of care". These health care professionals have a major role in sustaining the present Health Care System and they have the ability to provide valuable input.

This is not, from the Union's perspective, a "turf war" over which type of health care professional should perform specific tasks in relation to patient care. Registered Nurses have traditionally worked with various levels of support staff. These support staff provide quality health care, under the direct supervision of Registered Nurses. The issue is that all roles should work together to deliver the best quality of care possible.

In any review of the appropriate "staff mix" in health care settings, issues such as quality of care, responsibility and accountability for patient care will always be a primary consideration. By limiting the input of the Union and front line Registered Nurses in the development of the new model, Government has overlooked an invaluable and, in our view, necessary resource in the creation of the proposed new model of care. The process for change needs to have input from those who will be directly affected by the proposed changes and not solely from management and Government/employer chosen representatives.

If the Union that represents the 1200 plus front line Registered Nurses is kept in the dark during this process, it becomes very difficult to reassure members that appropriate evidence based research has been done or taken into consideration to support the proposed changes or that their voiced concerns are being heard.

Research on nursing staff mix has shown that patient outcomes improve with a higher proportion of Registered Nurses in the system. Adding more LPNs and unregulated workers to the mix will not address the Registered Nurse shortage, nor has it been proven in other jurisdictions to improve patient outcomes.

We have been assured that it is not this Government's intent to eliminate current Registered Nurses. Having said that, there is an imminent need for a succession plan for the large numbers of PEINU members reaching retirement age. Registered Nurses are leaving the system faster than the universities are producing replacements. Students are turned away every year from nursing programs across the country and yet we struggle daily with ongoing vacancies.

Until a viable succession plan has been created or one that listens to those Registered Nurses who are working in the current nursing shortage or stop gap measures that suggest supplementing Registered Nurses with additional support staff will lead to increased workload in relation to existing supervisory duties and a fragmentation of patient care.

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