

SPREA



**VERONIQUE
BOSCART**

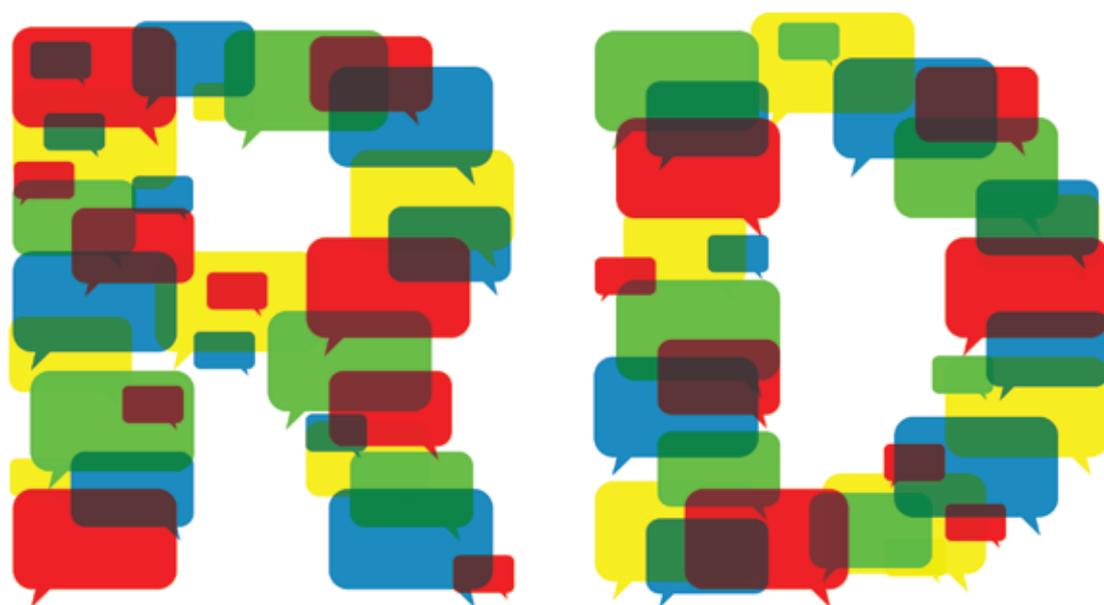


**JAMES
CHU**



**PAULA
POP**

D T H E



Veronique Boscart, James Chu and Paula Pop never expected to become ambassadors for RNAO. But after joining the association, they realized just how membership leads nurses down surprising, exciting and rewarding avenues. Whether involved in an interest group or on a chapter's executive, as a member of a best practice guideline panel, or a participant in advocacy efforts at the provincial or federal level, these RNs talk openly with peers about their experiences, and inspire others to fill out their membership forms. What motivated them to join their professional association, and how are they motivating others to do the same? **BY MELISSA DI COSTANZO**

VERONIQUE BOS CART

Veronique Boscart moved to Canada from her native Belgium in 2000. Once settled, she began working in acute care. She recalls an elderly man who had been admitted on her unit, but who “should not have been in the hospital to begin with.” He had behavioural issues, was being restrained, and had also contracted MRSA and VRE. “I didn’t fully understand the role of being an advocate as a nurse at that time,” she admits. “But I knew that man should have been in long-term care.”

As a new RNAO member, Boscart dialed up the association and asked for advocacy advice. To her delight, she received help and support “to start having a discussion with the physicians and the managers to say ‘we are not doing a good job in improving quality care here.’”

RNAO helped to boost Boscart’s confidence and gave her the courage to initiate that conversation with colleagues. And thanks, in part, to her advocacy, that elderly gentleman was eventually transferred to a long-term care home.

Boscart says she was floored by this experience and began delving deeper into RNAO’s offerings. She became more familiar with both the profession and the association, and began to understand how nursing contributes to the broader health-care system. She learned how to speak out for patients, and how to influence population health.

“To be a leader and to be an advocate, you need to be well-informed and you need to be part of a larger group that’s going to create that community where you can stand up and advocate for what is important,” she says. “RNAO has really done that for me.”

Boscart began to discover a passion for health policy and political issues, and developed relationships with key stakeholders in her community, including MPP and Conservative Health Critic Christine Elliott. She says RNAO’s high profile at Queen’s Park, and advocacy for nursing and health-care issues in the political arena opened up this opportunity.

In 2002, Boscart joined RNAO’s Nursing Research Interest Group (NRIG), assuming the roles of secretary, vice-chair and then chair over the span of eight years (from 2002 to 2010). These positions gave her a fresh perspective on the importance of supporting students to grow professionally. Interest groups help open students’ eyes to advocacy, she says, which is a crucial part of the job. “I feel it is my duty to make sure (students) understand that.”

Boscart has moved from acute care to research, and holds the CIHR Schlegel research chair for enhanced seniors

care through funding from the Research Institute for Aging, Conestoga College and the University of Waterloo. She’s also become an RNAO workplace liaison at Conestoga College, and is one of over 300 Ontario RNs who act as representatives of the association. In fact, Boscart has been rewarded for her impressive recruitment track record, receiving free membership for a full year three times thanks to the number of nursing colleagues she’s brought on board.

Boscart says RNAO helped her build up her Canadian nursing knowledge. Now, she’s paying it forward to as many peers and students as possible. “I truly think RNAO has so much to offer – it’s a shame if you’re not a member,” she says. “There’s so much that nurses can do together.”

JAMES CHU

Twelve years ago, as a nursing student at Humber College, James Chu began to learn about RNAO from fellow students and faculty members. He read about networking opportunities, students’

access to conferences, and the association’s chapters and regions. His interest was engaged, and he decided to fill out a membership form.

He realizes now just how little he knew about RNAO. “It’s much more than (workshops and programs like LAP),” he says.

In 2005, the president’s seat of RNAO’s Nursing Students of Ontario (NSO) interest group opened up, and Chu ran for the position. Besides looking good on his resume, he knew it would offer the networking opportunities he craved.

He went on to lead the group for two years, which opened the door to numerous prospects. “Being part of a bigger group than just your local nursing students, being able to be a part of a bigger message, being part of something that’s fulfilling, not just in the present, but in the future” were all rewarding aspects of sitting at the helm of NSO, Chu says. “It just opened my eyes... nursing is not just the clinical aspect. It’s much more than that.”

As a result of his involvement, Chu attended conferences and met with executives such as RNAO CEO Doris Grinspun, and honed his leadership skills. “I never imagined for a moment that I would build some of the relationships that I have,” he says, adding that “those relationships have helped me to develop my personal character as well as my leadership.”

Chu, who now works in the emergency department at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, is eager to recommend friends and colleagues join the association. He says he’s proud to have played a role in the recruitment

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of nurses, a handful of whom have gone on to lead active roles with their local chapters. “That’s the most rewarding factor: seeing people become more and more heavily involved,” he says. “That makes it important to me, because I’m seeing they’re getting the most out of their membership.”

After graduating, Chu took up the secretary position with RNAO’s Region 10 (Ottawa) for two years. He’s scaled back his involvement due to his heavy workload, but is hoping to ramp up his participation again. “I think you can get much more out of the membership being more directly involved,” he says, admitting “I wouldn’t even have had half of the experiences that I did as a student, and even early on in my career” if not for RNAO, he says, promising to continue to convey this message to colleagues who may be on the fence about joining.

Given his experience, Chu knows there are still lots of options to explore when it comes to his ongoing involvement with RNAO. After all: “You never know who you’re going to run into, and you never know what avenue your membership will take you down.”

PAULA POP

Paula Pop was studying RNAO’s *Risk Assessment and Prevention of Pressure Ulcers* best practice guideline (BPG) during her first year of nursing at York University when she became intrigued by the association, and what it has to offer. She started to explore RNAO’s website and within a matter of weeks, she had signed up to become a member. “It started with the guideline, but then I realized there was a plethora of information available...and so many different nursing-related avenues that RNAO offered,” she explains. Plus, student membership was reasonably priced (\$20/year) for what she could access (career counseling services and resources, educational opportunities and more).

Initially, Pop was specifically interested in the BPGs. In her

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second year of studies, she began volunteering on a panel for RNAO’s *Safe Sleep Practices for Infants* BPG (the guideline is still in development). It’s a rigorous process, admits Pop, but she enjoys working with peers from different professions who have the same goal in mind: collecting and presenting the best evidence that supports clinical practice.

Before long, Pop’s interests widened as she learned more and more about the importance of health advocacy through her schooling and the association. “As nurses, we’re taught from the first year of college that we’re patient advocates.” RNAO’s emphasis on strengthening healthy public policy motivated her to encourage fellow students to join. By her fourth year at York, Pop had become the RNAO representative on campus, promoting the offerings of the association and recruiting colleagues. Her experience on the BPG panel intrigued fellow students, many of whom asked how she became involved.

By promoting RNAO, Pop was able to bring students together to discuss common interests. They even joined forces to share opinions during the last provincial election. About 40 students joined RNAO thanks to Pop’s efforts. “I hope they (experience) what I’ve experienced,” she says. “I’ve gotten a lot out of RNAO.”

Pop graduated earlier this year, and is now working at Rouge Valley Health System as a staff nurse. Once the safe sleep BPG is

completed, she sees herself becoming involved in another panel, or an interest group (or two). Signing on to become a workplace liaison is also an idea she’s toying with.

Pop admits she has only touched the tip of the iceberg. “(Recruiting people) is how I can give back, not only to RNAO, but to my (nursing) community.” **RN**

MELISSA DI COSTANZO IS STAFF WRITER AT RNAO

RECRUIT...AND REAP THE REWARDS

RNAO values the role of recruiters, and offers a number of incentives to members who get friends, family and co-workers to join. The “Get 7” program is just one example. If you recruit seven new RNs, your next year’s membership is on us.

For every RN you sign up as a new member, you can also earn a \$20 RNAO gift certificate that can be used towards future membership fees or RNAO conferences and workshops. For every

undergraduate student you recruit, you will earn \$5. Remember to have new members include your name and your membership number on their applications.

If every member gets one RN to sign up, RNAO’s numbers will double. That means over 65,000 nurses and nursing students will be speaking out for nursing, speaking out for health, and influencing healthy public policy to advance the profession and improve health outcomes for Ontarians.