



Membership: a force for positive change

FOR MANY OF US, FALL SIGNIFIES A new year because it marks the end of summer and the start of a new school year. For me, it's a time to reflect. And for RNAO, fall reflections always focus on membership. Being a member of something connotes the concepts of participation, belonging, fellowship and enrollment. For me, RNAO membership has been all these things and more.

When I moved to Ontario from Quebec, I knew little about the health-care system in Ontario, and much less about the issues facing nurses and other health-care providers. The College of Nurses of Ontario helped me appreciate the standards and expectations required for registration. However, it was connecting with RNAO that helped create my sense of a 'professional' home.

Why is membership important? And why do I believe all RNs in Ontario should be members of their professional organization?

I think the answer lies in the key elements of membership.

The first element is participation. RNAO allows every registered nurse in Ontario to participate in optimizing their practice, addressing healthy workplace and best practice issues, and advocating for policies that protect health and promote the practice of nursing. When I ask colleagues why they chose nursing, the most common answer I receive is: "I wanted to make a difference."

Participating in RNAO as an active member allows you to make that difference. And the great part is you can participate in so many different ways. You can help to guide the work of a BPG, engage in political action by signing an *Action Alert*, or add your name to a petition that addresses the issues confronting your practice or community.

"I AM ISSUING A CHALLENGE THAT WE EACH BRING AT LEAST ONE NEW MEMBER TO RNAO BY TELLING COLLEAGUES WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS WHY WE BELONG TO OUR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION."

The second element is belonging. That sense of belonging to your profession is part of every nurse's identity. Belonging to RNAO supports the image and impact of nurses. Membership allows the strength of a common purpose to flourish. And adding more voices ensures a sustainable health system that meets the needs of people, addresses the social determinants of health, and positions nurses as knowledge workers.

I have met nurses who have become acquainted with RNAO more than a decade into their careers. Many were disillusioned, felt they were no longer able to make a difference, and considered leaving the profession. These were

strong, capable and competent RNs feeling adrift. Belonging to RNAO helped them to understand the reasons behind their malaise, and provided them with tools to access information and data to address issues they identified in need of fixing. Some of these same nurses became voting delegates at annual meetings. And I hope to see some run for

positions on the board of directors in the future.

The third element is fellowship. While linked to belonging, fellowship is more about companionship and comradeship. For members of RNAO, there are countless ways to experience a sense of fellowship. The International Affairs and Best Practice Guidelines Centre offers numerous workshops, institutes and seminars for members. These provide opportunities for learning and building nursing networks. Chapter and regional meetings, and RNAO interest group meetings, are another way to share knowledge, create common goals, and foster a sense of nursing community. Active chapter or region

members also get to attend assembly meetings. These gatherings generate that sense of fellowship, belonging and partnership, allowing members to share experiences with colleagues across the province.

I am a proud member of RNAO. Being a member, staying a member and encouraging others to become members only enhances our profession and the impact nurses have on health promotion, illness prevention and healthy public policy. This is where the fourth concept of enrollment comes in. RNAO has a proud history of being an effective organization. We have accomplished much, and we have much more to do. There is no question that if we encourage every RN in Ontario to become a member, we would add even more clout to an already strong association. That's why I am issuing a challenge that we each bring at least one new member to RNAO by telling colleagues who are not members why we belong to our professional association. We're already a powerhouse, and by growing, we will bring even more positive change for nursing and our patients. **RN**

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