



Advancing positive change with premiers past and present

WHEN DALTON MCGUINTY announced his resignation last fall, I was not surprised. After 10 years as Ontario's premier, many suspected he would not stay for another election. Nonetheless, I was saddened. First, that he prorogued the legislature, a move that I – like most Ontarians – did not support. More importantly, though, I was saddened to see the departure of a premier who had been an awesome friend to nursing, and quite progressive on health and health-care issues. During his tenure, McGuinty launched several initiatives that have changed the profession forever, and many emerged from discussions with RNAO. Let's reflect on the most important milestones, and how we advance these with our new premier, Kathleen Wynne.

Ontario's NPs have seen substantive gains in their scope of practice thanks to McGuinty. His support, and the understanding of then Health Minister George Smitherman, resulted in the opening of Canada's first NP-led clinic in 2007. Another 25 such clinics have since opened across the province, providing access for thousands of Ontarians. NPs are finally working autonomously, prescribing without "a list," and are now authorized to admit, treat, transfer and discharge inpatients in hospital. Ontario is the first jurisdiction in North America where this is possible, and Canada is one of only three countries in the world to enjoy this expanded scope for

NPs. Credit goes to McGuinty and Health Minister Deb Matthews for this. Going forward, we must see NPs with the same authority and expanded scope working in Ontario's nursing homes to enable timely diagnosis and treatment.

Other milestones during McGuinty's tenure include the 70 per cent full-time employment and Nursing Graduate Guarantee. When first elected

"POLICY AND FUNDING DECISIONS WILL TELL US OF PREMIER WYNNE'S STRENGTH AND ABILITY TO BUILD A PROGRESSIVE VISION."

in 2003, barely half of nurses were working full time. Today, 68.6 per cent of RNs have full-time employment. And, since 2007, new graduates have been guaranteed full-time positions as they begin their careers. Nurses 55 and older can also thank McGuinty for launching the Late-Career Nurse Initiative in 2004, allowing them to spend 80 per cent of their time on direct patient care and 20 per cent mentoring or participating in professional development.

Unfortunately, not all was rosy for our former premier, especially related to our RN-to-population ratios. During his first term in 2003, Ontario had 70 RNs per 10,000 people, a number that only sits at 70.5 per 10,000 today. Ontario saw encouraging

gains through McGuinty's first six years as premier, but the bulk of those gains were given back in the last two years. Ontario now ranks second worst in the country, a stark reminder that we must insist that government and health-care organizations focus on greater employment of the RN workforce.

I look forward to a very positive relationship with Ontario's new – and first female – Premier

was purposefully released the day after Premier Wynne's election, sending a clear message that Ontario's RNs will continue to urge all political leaders to improve access to RN care, strengthen our publicly funded, not-for-profit health-care system, lift people out of poverty, clean-up our environment, and restore fiscal capacity on the basis of progressive taxation. Our members have already met with 80 MPPs across the province to discuss the policy platform (see *Queen's Park on the Road*, page 22).

The legislature's prorogation and the transition of a premier did not serve to quiet down the urgency of RNAO's advocacy. Armed with evidence, our members have used every week, day and minute to take RNAO's recommendations to communities across Ontario. I have also met regularly with – and been impressed by – Conservative Leader Tim Hudak and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath. Both are well versed on RNAO's recommendations. Now, they too must follow with actions.

RNAO and its members' collective focus on values-driven and evidence-based advocacy, coupled with our strong partnerships with political leaders and MPPs from all parties, will serve nurses and Ontarians well as we work to make these recommendations a reality. **RN**

Kathleen Wynne. I was privileged to be invited to her swearing in ceremony, and applaud her integrity and openness about her sexual orientation. As the first openly gay premier, she exemplifies the power of standing tall and proud of who you are. I was tremendously moved when she said: "It is not lost on me that I am the first woman to be sworn into this office, and that I'm doing so with the support of the woman I love."

Courage, integrity, honesty and solid social values are important hallmarks of our new premier. But, only policy and funding decisions will tell us of Premier Wynne's strength and ability to build a progressive vision. RNAO's policy platform, *Why Your Health Matters*,

DORIS GRINSPUN, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(HON), O.ONT, IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF RNAO.