

# Mailbag

RNAO wants to hear your comments, opinions, suggestions

## Civilian physician assistants need closer examination

*Re: Member responds to RNAO's views on physician assistants, November/December 2010*

I am a fourth year nursing student at the University of Ottawa. I have been researching the issue of Physician Assistants (PAs) as part of a group project focused on political action. I am also an active member of the Canadian Forces.

I personally take issue with people attempting to substantiate the use of PAs by using the argument that the military has used them for quite a number of years. Even though this is true, it is not often pointed out that there are vast differences in the education and training of military and civilian PAs.

Before becoming a PA in the military, a member must first serve as a medical assistant for a number of years (usually a minimum of eight) gaining valuable education, clinical experience, discipline and leadership skills. On the other hand, a civilian can enter into the two-year PA degree program offered at McMaster University having only completed two years of an undergraduate degree that does not even have to be related to health care. To say that these two are equitable or even comparable is quite an exaggeration.

I do agree with Marilyn Crummey that RNs may not be fully informed on the PA issue. However, abandoning support for RNAO's position is not the answer.

**Teresa Levesque, Ottawa, Ontario**

## RN shares experiences of double-duty care

*Re: RNs take on twice the workload to care for family members at home*

I found this article very interesting. The writer states that some organizations allow nurses to take family days. That is good. My parents are elderly and do not drive. As the daughter who lives closest to them, I see to their appointments and medications, but my employer makes me switch days or take vacation days in order to do these errands for them and make appointments on my days off, meaning I really do not get much rest. They don't acknowledge the definition of "family days" to include doctor appointments or other medical appointments. For our own sick days, we are called at home on the days that we call in sick. I had no sick days in 2008, and my reward from the hospital was coupons for six small cups of free coffee from the hospital coffee shop. Sometimes you just get tired of fighting to stay in the profession.

**Name withheld by request**

## RNAO wins prestigious awards

RNAO's Best Practice Guidelines Program recently received three top awards from provincial, national and international organizations.



In November, the association's innovative approach to provide high-quality long term care received the Minister's Award of Excellence. Accepting the award were (L-R): Ontario's Chief Nursing Officer Vanessa Burkoski; long-term care BPG coordinators Saima Shaikh, Maryanne D'Arpino, Gina De Souza, Heather Thompson and Heather Woodbeck; RNAO staff Heather McConnell and Citlali Singh and Executive Director Doris Grinspun. Holding the award are Long-Term Care Best Practices team lead Josie Santos, left, and Health Minister Deb Matthews. RN



Also in November, RNAO, the joint RNAO/University of Ottawa Nursing Best Practice Research Unit and 21 Best Practice Spotlight Organizations received the inaugural Practice Academe Innovation Collaboration award at the Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) conference. The award recognizes efforts between nursing practice and academia to improve health. Pictured receiving the award (L-R): Heather McConnell, RNAO; Barbara Davies, co-chair of the NBPRU; Irmajean Bajnok, RNAO; Doris Grinspun, RNAO; and Carol Huston, STTI.



The Canadian Dental Association recognized RNAO for its outstanding contribution to oral health through the best practice guideline, *Oral Health: Nursing Assessment and Intervention*. RNAO members accepted the Oral Health Promotion award in Ottawa. L-R: RNAO board member Nancy Watters; Una Ferguson, a member of the guideline's panel; Toba Miller, lead of the panel; and Dr. Don Friedlander, president of CDA.