

Nursing in the news

RNAO & RNs weigh in on . . .



CMAT members perform surgery by flashlight at a field hospital in Haiti.

Emergency aid to Haiti

Four RNAO members — Valerie Rzepka, Aric Rankin, Carolyn Davies and Maida Mrakovic — joined thousands of Canadian aid workers and health-care professionals who swiftly travelled to Port-au-Prince, Haiti following a deadly earthquake that rocked the country in mid-January.

The trio travelled to Leogane, a city about 30 km west of Port-au-Prince, to provide emergency medical care as part of the 16-member Canadian Medical Assistance Team (CMAT), which Rzepka chairs. With the help of a contingent of Canadian sailors, the group erected a hospital where health providers could treat hundreds of people with crush injuries and infections. “There is not a lot of infrastructure here. These people are the poorest of the poor, and now they are even poorer. So they need as much care as they can get,” Rzepka told the *National Post* (Jan. 22).

Volunteer health workers also had to worry about fatigue. “We start at eight o’clock in the morning and we go until eight o’clock at night ...you try to get a break when you can,” Rankin told the *Post* (Jan. 22).



Canadian Medical Assistance Team members work to treat a burn victim in Leogane, Haiti.

CMAT members have experience responding to massive natural disasters, including the 2004 Asian tsunami, floods in Bangladesh and earthquakes in Pakistan and China. The work “really calls to me,” Rzepka told the *Toronto Sun* (Jan. 14). **RN**

Olympic inspiration

In December, lucky RNAO members **Karen Michelsen** and **Linda Ready** got a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help kick off the 2010 Winter Olympics. The pair was selected to carry the torch through Cobourg, Ont., as it headed west for Vancouver for the games. “It is a great honour. I never thought I would be doing something like this,” Michelsen told the *Kingston Whig-Standard* (Dec 14). To snag the role, she wrote a letter on how she keeps active, which is no challenge for the St. Michael’s Hospital RN. She has run 30 marathons on all seven continents, including races in Egypt, Antarctica, Chile, Japan and Las Vegas. She finds time to run 32 km in between 12-hour shifts and holds an advanced brown belt in karate. Michelsen was inspired to become a marathon runner after fighting SARS

as a member of an acute care team. “That is when I discovered life is really short,” she says.

Ready’s essay also earned her a spot on the torch-bearing team. The Ross Memorial Hospital RN jogged the 300-metre relay through Cobourg on Dec. 15. She admitted it would have been nice to run in Lindsay, her hometown, but said the opportunity to meet participants from other communities and hear their stories made up for having to go elsewhere. “It was humbling, inspiring and a huge honour...and one of the coolest experiences of my life,” she told *Kawartha Lakes This Week* (Dec. 17).

Climate change

As the world’s top political leaders met in Copenhagen in December to try and reach a much-needed agreement on cli-

mate change, Ontario nurses called the meetings a squandered opportunity. RNAO President **Wendy Fucile** called the lack of leadership and strong action from Canada deeply disturbing because “nurses know how global warming is dangerous for our health and our patients.” Fucile pointed to the lack of targets for emissions cuts and the fact that the agreement isn’t binding as evidence of how little was accomplished during the two-week-long conference (*CFOS-AM Owen Sound*, Dec. 23). RNAO Executive Director **Doris Grinspun** said the failure to act is inexcusable. “It’s clear Mr. Harper wasn’t listening, but we urge him to step up and lead on this issue,” she said, adding, “Canada is a wealthy nation that is playing a negative role in global warming through decades of high per capita emissions,” (*Canadian Business Online*, Dec. 21).

Leadership abroad

Nurses in Shanghai learned about the importance of a healthy work environment and nursing leadership during a conference in late November. **Irmajean Bajnok**, RNAO's Director of International Affairs and Best Practice Guidelines Programs, travelled to China to deliver workshops and speak to members of the Shanghai Nurses Association. The workshops focused on nursing management and drew material from RNAO's best practice guideline, *Developing and Sustaining Nursing Leadership*. "A better working environment has been an important issue globally, especially in nursing," Bajnok told *Sing Tao Daily* (Dec. 4). The visit was part of an ongoing partnership between RNAO, the Beijing Nightingale Consultation of Culture and the Chinese Nursing Association.

Running to become an MPP

RNAO member and well-known street nurse **Cathy Crowe** set her sights on provincial politics when she joined the race to replace outgoing Toronto-Centre MPP George Smitherman. Crowe represented the New Democratic Party in the Feb. 4 by-election. As of press time, the results of vote were not available. Crowe is a community health nurse who has worked with the homeless and disadvantaged for 25 years. "As a nurse, I've seen a lot of conditions worsen in the riding," she told the *Toronto Star* (Jan. 7). "I want to be able to speak of the need for more funding for social programs and better spending in terms of health-care dollars," (*Northumberland Today*, Jan. 8).



Cathy Crowe is the NDP candidate in a Toronto by-election this February.

Reducing wait times

RNAO member **Janet McCabe** says urgent care centres are one of the Toronto area's best kept secrets. McCabe is the clinical leader of the Trillium Health Centre's urgent care facility. In December, she spoke with the *Toronto Star* urging people to consider the centre as an alternative to busy emergency departments. "The public is gradually getting to know about us more and more. The secret is getting out," McCabe said (Dec. 28). The centre treats patients with minor emergencies such as fractures, sprains, burns, stitches and more. They don't take life-threatening cases, aren't open 24 hours and don't have in-patient beds to admit patients. But they're fast. Patients who are considered low acuity can wait up to five hours at Trillium's ER. The urgent care centre aims to treat and assess them in 60 to 90 minutes. The province is using these centres as part of a strategy to reduce long wait times in the ER.

Physician assistants in Ontario

RNAO President **Wendy Fucile** raised the association's concerns on physician assistants in January. She told the *Toronto Sun* RNAO is worried about the role because of a lack of education and oversight. "To belong to a regulated profession gives to the public a sense of assurance that somebody out there is taking a stand to protect their safety. The introduction of another health role without that protection is a disservice to the public," she said (Jan 21). Executive Director **Doris Grinspun** echoed those concerns during an interview on Jan. 26 with radio station *98 The Beach* in Port Elgin.

*On Dec. 18, RNAO member **Linda Bishop** wrote a letter to the Brock Citizen explaining the seriousness of peanut allergies.*

Peanut issue boils down to respect

I have been reading with some disgust the recent letters to the editor regarding peanut limitations in our schools. I am a mother of a child who is anaphylactic to peanuts. I am also a registered nurse. Peanut is one of the most severe food allergens and it can produce an anaphylactic reaction, which is life threatening. We send our children to elementary school because it is their right. But it is the school's responsibility, as well as that of all parents and fellow students, to contribute to a safe environment for everyone. Young children need time to learn, grow and be a kid. Anaphylactic children are not born knowing how to keep themselves safe, they need time and a safe environment to do so. Our schools are trying to give them this by asking everyone to avoid bringing peanut products to school. Many school officials are also trained in how to care for these children until they get to hospital. When our daughter was diagnosed, our family took on the responsibility of educating ourselves about her condition. I encourage you to get over the limitations of taking peanut butter to school and spend time explaining responsibility and respect for others to your child. If you need ideas for lunch boxes, I have lots.

Linda Bishop,
Beaverton

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Treating mental illness

RNAO member and nurse practitioner (NP) **Donna Kydd** (right) works

with patient Marion Harper at an NP-led clinic in Oshawa. The clinic is the Greater Toronto Area's first and the only one focusing on mental health patients and their families. "We see people who have not been successful in finding a family doctor," she said. It's not unusual for patients with serious mental illnesses to have a hard time keeping a physician, according to Kydd. They can miss appointments, take longer to interview, some are transient and some have trouble complying with treatment (*Toronto Star*, Jan 2).

Photo: Colin McConnell/Getty.com

The clinic opened a year ago as a pilot, but was given final approval by the province in November, bringing the number of NP-led clinics announced to 11.

Dancing for health's sake

RNAO member **Bev Boyes** is lacing up her dancing shoes for a good cause. On Feb. 20, the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance NP is taking part in the third annual Dancing for the Stars fundraising event. She and five physician colleagues will be coupled with a professional dancer from Toronto and will learn two ballroom dances such as the Fox Trot or Cha Cha Cha. Donations will go towards purchasing new medical equipment and updating facilities and services that need it most at both the Chatham and Wallaceburg campuses. Last year, more than \$14,500 was raised to help pay for an MRI scanner for the hospitals (*Chatham This Week*, Dec 9).

Cancer care

An interest in oncology nursing led RNAO members **Melissa Snell** and **Nisha Sutherland** to win fellowships from the de Souza Institute for cancer care in Toronto. Both are graduates of the University of Western Ontario in London. Snell received \$10,000 to pursue her master's and Sutherland received \$20,000 to put towards her PhD. "It is wonderful to have resources like this available," Snell told the *London Free Press* (Dec. 8). Along with receiving financial support from the institute – which is funded by the province – Snell will participate in monthly professional development seminars with other nurses. RNAO member **Mary Jane Esplen**, director of de Souza Institute says the "fellowship program . . . will potentially enable these nurses to make a tremendous future impact on cancer care in Ontario." **RN**

Out & About



On Jan. 17, members of RNAO's Lakehead Chapter volunteered at the local Shelter House to serve dinner to nearly 200 homeless people living in Thunder Bay. Chapter members hope to help out at the dinner once a month to raise awareness of poverty in the city and around the province. The group also hopes to find volunteers to knit hats and scarves to be donated to the homeless throughout the winter. Here (L-R), Sally Dampier, Jan Seeley and Nicole Landgradd get ready to serve up vegetables.



Nursing Students of Ontario executive member **Nik Broukhanski** recently got an inside look at health issues affecting transit workers. The Lakehead University student completed a clinical placement at the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) this winter. Broukhanski, shown here at a maintenance facility for buses and streetcars, worked with the Health and Wellness team. The team promotes healthy lifestyles among TTC employees and helps those who are currently on long-term disability return to work. He also helped out during a campaign called *Eat the Better Way*.



In November, RNAO's Nursing Best Practice Champions network welcomed its 3,000th member. Esmerelda Van Riemsdijk (right), a nurse practitioner at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, received the honour from Heather McConnell, associate director of RNAO's International Affairs and Best Practice Guidelines (BPG) program. Champions work in their organizations to encourage their colleagues to use RNAO's BPGs in their practice.