



Nursing: A feast of opportunities, a passport for life

I AM OFTEN ASKED WHAT IT IS LIKE TO work with Ontario's new Minister of Health Eric Hoskins, and if the priorities for nursing have changed since June's provincial election. The answer: We have a good relationship with Minister Hoskins, but at the end of the day, what really counts is deliverables. On this, RNAO's vision for RNs, NPs and nursing students has not changed.

So, what do we expect from our new government?

To answer this, let's first reflect on some RNAO-led accomplishments. We called for 70 per cent full-time employment for RNs, and are close to achieving that target. New graduates are now guaranteed full-time positions, and the *Late-Career Nurse Initiative* allows nurses 55 and over to spend time mentoring and engaging in professional development.

Ontarians are fortunate to now have 26 NP-led clinics, and patients in hospitals are starting to reap the benefits of NPs' legislated authority to admit, treat, transfer and discharge (ATTD) from in-patient units. Chief nurse executives (CNE) sit as mandatory members on hospital boards, and each public health unit in the province must have a chief nurse officer. For more RNAO achievements, see the March/April 2013 CEO Dispatch, *Advancing positive change with premiers past and present*.

Let's look now at the future, and our focus with the new government.

We were thrilled this spring

when Premier Kathleen Wynne announced at RNAO's *Nursing Week Career Expo* that, if voted premier again, she would ensure RNs in Ontario would be able to prescribe medications, and NPs to order MRIs and CT scans. These announcements were important, and a direct result of our intense, evidence-based advocacy. They will allow for faster and better access to health services.

This summer, I briefed the premier and Minister Hoskins on RNAO's top priorities for

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the next four years. In addition to holding government to its existing promises, a critical change is NP compensation. NPs in primary care are not fairly compensated compared to NPs who work in Ontario's hospitals and other jurisdictions, such as Alberta. We are working diligently to change this, both in terms of salary and benefits, and I am confident it will.

We will also continue our in-depth work with the ATTD task force, co-led by RNAO President Vanessa Burkoski (herself an NP) and Lakeridge Health NP Michelle Acorn. The task force developed a toolkit that has helped with the implementation

of this enhanced NP role in hospitals. On Oct. 20, RNAO will host a think tank with Ontario CNEs to hear their progress and to strategize next steps to cement the comprehensive care NPs are educated and authorized to provide. We are thrilled to partner with the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario (NPAO) and the Nursing Leadership Network (NLN) as the two most relevant interest groups on this important policy priority.

So, what else is in store over the next four years?

These important documents also highlight the critical role of long-term care (LTC) in the years ahead. The progress here was palpable when then Health Minister Deb Matthews announced at RNAO's 2014 *Queen's Park Day* funding for 75 NP positions in nursing homes. I was delighted to co-chair a task force with Debra Bournes, Ontario's former chief nursing officer, to develop the role description and urge a ratio of one NP per 150 residents. RNAO will continue to work side-by-side with relevant interest groups (NPAO, gerontological nurses and NLN) to support our LTC NPs.

Going forward, how do we optimize and expand the roles of RNs and NPs in public health and home care? And, what's in store for nursing students? On this, stay tuned.

When I envision the future of nursing, I truly believe that, of all health professions, nursing students will find themselves at graduation with a feast of opportunities and a passport for life. Whether they join the ranks of RNs or advanced practice nurses, including NPs, they will experience a career second to none. Choosing from a variety of sectors, specialties and roles, they will no doubt inspire themselves and others. **RN**

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