

Political engagement: An integral part of nursing



With another Nursing Week *Take Your MPP to Work* event behind us, it's only fitting that we reflect on the success of this annual program and why it is so important. This year, about 40

MPPs joined RNAO members at work. This represents phenomenal growth since the program's humble beginnings in 2000. Now, politicians call us asking to be part of the event.

Take Your MPP to Work is about nurses translating their day-to-day practice to politicians. This kind of political engagement is tremendously important. It provides the profession with the opportunity to showcase the vital work of nurses.

As they walk for an hour (or more) in your shoes, MPPs and MPs can better understand the knowledge and skills required to be an RN. And, as the media profiles your work, the public grasps the impact of nurses' work.

As Laurie Spooner, political action officer for region 6 and staff nurse at The Hospital for Sick Children, told *Metro* on May 10: "It's not just a cliché to say that we are the front lines of health care – we are. When someone first walks in those doors, we make a difference that could be between life and death."

Just imagine the impact when more than 420,000 commuters picked up the *Metro Newspaper* and read Laurie's message.

Political engagement can take many forms. It can range from being an activist in your professional association, and *Taking your MPP to Work*, to responding to RNAO's Action Alerts, to being a formal candidate during municipal, provincial and federal elections.

Our profession is proud of the work of several terrific social activists, including: Kathy Hardill, who fights for solutions to end poverty; Cathy Crowe, whose primary cause is to end the shame of homelessness; and the

many of you who speak out against for-profit health care, and/or advocate for full-time employment and for incentives to relieve senior nurses who feel over-worked. You all make us very proud and RNAO stands up with you to speak out loud and clear.

With a provincial election expected on October 07, 2007, and a possible federal election soon thereafter, now is the time to consider making formal politics the next step in your nursing career. You may wonder, why is it important for RNs to seek office? What qualities do you need? What contributions will you be able to make? These are exactly the kinds of questions Kate

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Wilson asked herself before she decided to run as the Liberal candidate in the riding of Bradford during the recent federal election.

Wilson is a nurse practitioner who shared her political experience with members during RNAO's January assembly. She said nurses have many of the qualities one needs as a politician: exceptional capacity for leadership, an ability to deal with difficult problems and under tight time constraints, and the ability to work well in a team.

RNAO members also have additional traits that will lead to success in politics. You have the ideas, the passion and the desire to advocate. You are engaged citizens who can count on the public's respect and connection with RNAO, nursing and nurses.

Nurses have a tremendous amount to

contribute to the province's – and the country's – most pressing public policy issues. Each of you know where health-care policy and people's lives intersect. You already have the tools – and RNAO's full support – to weigh-in on so many issues: from health and illness care, to health-care reforms, to the hidden barriers that determine one's health such as poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion. And, you know better than anyone else that access to health care must be determined by one's need, not the size of one's wallet.

We need RNs' perspectives, passion, persuasion and persistence to shake-up politics and make healthy public policy a reality at home and abroad. This is why RNAO would like to extend an invitation to members, as we did three years ago, to consider running for office.

We are committed to changing the political landscape so that nurses can become legislators. To this end, RNAO will offer, once again, the *RN Candidate Training Program*, designed to help RNs (members of RNAO), gain the skills needed for political life. To participate in this program, you need to be committed to run for public office in the political party of your choice. The program will begin this fall.

The training workshops will cover everything from getting nominated and setting up your campaign to media training and fundraising. The program is free of charge, but participants will be responsible for travel and accommodation expenses.

I know you have what it takes to succeed in politics.

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I look forward to the day when you will take your seat as an MPP at Queen's Park or an MP in Ottawa.

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IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RNAO.