

Recognition demands even greater responsibility



March 31, the day I was invested into the Order of Ontario, will always occupy a special place in my life. It is a tremendous professional and personal acknowledgement, and I truly see it as collective recognition of our profession, professional association, and the incredible partners – both professional and personal – with whom we work so intensely to protect and strengthen Medicare.

The Order of Ontario recognizes and honours those who have enriched the lives of others by attaining the highest standards of excellence and achievement in their respective fields. It is my belief that nurses embody these attributes every day in their contribution to the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities across Ontario.

Indeed, the results of the 2004 Leger Marketing study on the *Top Most Admired Professions by Canadians* revealed that nurses have the highest level of public trust – 95 per cent – of any health-care professional.

This recognition and trust brings with it even greater responsibility. As registered nurses, we are unwavering in our conviction that access to care must be based on need, not ability to pay. Now, more than ever, we must be diligent in our efforts to steer politicians, decision-makers, and the Canadian public in purposeful and strategic ways to this same conviction.

Sadly, after two years of deliberation and debate and the release of Commissioner Roy Romanow's final report, *Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada*, little, if any, progress has been made to secure the reforms outlined in this remarkable blueprint.

Today, Canada is at a crossroads, and the events that are about to unfold this summer have the potential to irrevocably and irre-

versibly alter our national health-care identity.

Prime Minister Paul Martin has called a federal election, but his own government cannot reach consensus on the issue of delivery of health-care services. On April 27, Health Minister Pierre Pettigrew said he favours experimenting with private delivery. On April 28, he said that his goal is to expand public delivery. Which is it?

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's health policy platform indicates he believes

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in universal access, but openly argues that the provinces should be free to privatize delivery. NDP Leader Jack Layton wants to stop privatization to ensure public money goes to health care, not profits.

Indeed, a key election focus will be whether profit-driven investors will have a greater involvement in the delivery of health care. As registered nurses, we must intensify our discussions about the direction of health care with colleagues, family, friends and community members, and urge every citizen to cast their vote for a healthy country. RNAO will do its part by playing a central role, in partnership with the Canadian Health Coalition, to lead the *Medicare Protection Pledge* campaign. I urge you to visit www.medicare.ca to sign the petition and encourage many others to sign, download

the pledge, and ask for the signatures of local MPPs, MPs and federal candidates.

In addition to the pending federal election, the current prime minister and the provincial/territorial leaders are planning a health care summit. RNAO will pressure the government to ensure this meeting is open and fully televised. We know where Canadians stand and we have every right to know where each first minister stands. Who sides with the great majority of Canadians supporting reforms based on publicly funded and not-for profit delivered health care? Who doesn't? This is not the time to waffle. This is the time to define ourselves and the nation as we move forward to protect and strengthen Medicare.

The proponents of privatization and for-profit health care, although few in numbers, can marshal the media and significant financial resources. In response, Canadians and their nurses must mobilize themselves and mobilize those around them to make the one responsible choice. It is a choice between eroding access and effectiveness through increased for-profit delivery or, instead, expanding not-for-profit delivery and the principles of the Canada Health Act (CHA) to include public health, primary health care, home health care, long-term care, rehabilitation and catastrophic drug coverage. It is a choice between health care as a benefit for some or health care as a human right for all.

The Order of Ontario is our award. I encourage each of you to take personal joy from this achievement and embrace an even greater responsibility to preserve and strengthen Medicare.

Medicare is our single greatest collective asset – and should remain that way.

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