



Reflections on two years of infectious action

IT HARDLY SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT TWO years have passed since I wrote my very first president's column. I have come to value this opportunity to share my thoughts on the issues that face us as an association and as individual nurses. I have also appreciated your feedback – both positive and negative. Your honest reflections are a powerful learning tool, and I thank you for them.

For this final column, I want to look back on RNAO's work during my presidency. When I first assumed the role, there were several goals I expressed as my own commitment to action. First of those was to strengthen even further the recognition of RNAO as a voice for nursing and for the people living in our communities, our province, and our country. Many of the challenges we have tackled – from the environment to poverty – are issues that affect us all. Nurses have special expertise in the effects of some of these issues, but the healthy changes we seek are outcomes for all people, not just for nurses. During the past two years, our collective advocacy has resulted in the introduction of the strongest anti-pesticide legislation in all of North America and the unveiling of a poverty reduction strategy.

But perhaps the best example of the degree to which the association's voice is being heard lies in a question I was asked repeatedly when we released *Creating Vibrant*

Communities: RNAO's Challenge to Ontario's Political Parties in advance of next year's provincial election. In that document, we urged present and future governments to resist the urge to sell off Crown corporations. That led journalists to ask me: "why do nurses care about Crown corporations?" The answer is simple. Citizens, not governments, own these organizations and we recognize the critical value of a long-term, proven resource over a short-sighted windfall. But there's also a profound truth behind that question and my response. People care about what nurses think because we are trusted and respected for our actions on behalf of others.

As RNs, we also have a duty to protect, on behalf of all Canadians, our universal, not-for-profit health care system. Doing so was an important goal for me, and, if one measures success by the degree of negative reaction our efforts elicited from the for-profit sector, then we have surely scored successes there! The public has heard the voice of RNAO defending this precious national treasure – and people recognize very clearly the egocentric self-interest of those who would destroy the single-payer system.

During the past two years, RNAO has continued to advance clear successes on the nursing front as well. We're getting closer to our goal of 70 per cent full-time employment for RNs.

Today, 65.6 per cent of nurses work full-time, compared with 59.2 in 2004. And the government has committed to open 25 additional nurse practitioner-led clinics, following the success of the first one in Sudbury. During my term, I also wanted to see a stronger connection between practice and education. I am proud, both as your President and in my role as the Acting Director of the school of nursing at Trent University, to say that RNAO has, for the first time, a Best Practice Spotlight Organization candidate that is an

has also been involved in strategic planning and we should hear the result in the near future. I will share more about this at RNAO's AGM.

Jesse Jackson once said "time is neutral and does not change things. With courage and initiative, leaders change things." It's easy to see this at RNAO! Two years would pass without a ripple unless there was action. RNAO is a call to action and a responder to such calls. Your President, whoever he or she may be, your Board Members, your Executive

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Ontario nursing school. But perhaps the most critical piece for me, in terms of the profession, was the desire to see every nurse, everywhere practising at his or her full scope. While that goal is not yet fully achieved, we have moved towards it with Bill 179, legislation that regulates health professionals in Ontario.

Finally, at the national level, the RNAO-CNA relationship is strong and vital. We have more national activity on issues that RNAO is passionate about – such as the environment – more shared work on nurse fatigue, and we continue to press CNA for serious and sustained action on social determinants of health and protecting Medicare. CNA

Director, your Chapter and Interest Group executives, and every member of this organization are all leaders. We have the courage to create the change to move our communities and our profession forward. That is our very reason for being.

Finally, if there is one, enduring lesson I have learned, it is that RNAO is like a virus – once infected, it cannot be easily eradicated. When challenged, it has the strength to protect its core, shift its shape and emerge even stronger for the test. I am (happily!) infected for life. And there isn't an antidote – nor should there be! **RN**

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