

Rough start pays off for award-winning RN

DESPITE A DECADE OF NURSING EXPERIENCE, EDEL MUTIA STRUGGLED TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS AN RN IN ONTARIO.

IT WASN'T HOW EDEL MUTIA PICTURED life in Canada when he and his wife emigrated from the Philippines in 2007. He'd read about Canadian nursing shortages, and came to Toronto expecting to continue his career as an RN. But even with 10+ years of experience, Mutia found himself unable to practise. In fact, he was told he needed another four-year baccalaureate degree just to be eligible to take his registration exam.

"I had my family to feed. Going to school isn't cheap. How could I provide (while) going to school?" Mutia remembers wondering.

Despite this once-desperate position, Mutia has established himself as a leader in Ontario nursing. He now works as a full time ICU charge nurse at Toronto's North York General Hospital (NYGH) and part time on Scarborough General Hospital's critical care response team. In 2013, he received the *Joan Lesmond Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) of the Year Award* from the CARE (Creating Access to Regulated Employment) Centre, an organization that supports IENs as they register to practise in Ontario. The annual honour is named after the late RAO president, who, an IEN herself, was active for many years on CARE's board of directors.

"I never expected (the award)," he says. "I keep telling them that a simple thank you and a simple smile are (enough) for me."

Mutia grew up in a village on the southern Philippine island

of Mindanao. Like thousands of Filipinos before him, he discovered nursing provided the opportunity to find financial stability working abroad. Shortly after his graduation in 1994, his grandfather fell ill, so the young RN decided to stay close to home, beginning his career at a community hospital while caring for his family's patriarch.

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once it came time to prepare for the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE). With CARE's support, Mutia appealed his CNO assessment, and his registration requirements were reduced to a year's worth of courses at Toronto's George Brown College.

He passed his CRNE in 2008, and was hired to the role he still holds today at NYGH.



Three things you don't know about Edsel Mutia:

1. He is a ballroom dancer who teaches lessons at a local church.
2. Tuesday is movie night, and he loves superhero films.
3. An avid tennis fan, Mutia aspires to be the next Rafael Nadal.

At the understaffed and underfunded hospital, Mutia was often responsible for up to 50 patients at a time. It forced him to be resourceful and adaptable. "When I stepped into my hospital, I had to expect it was not fully equipped," he recalls. "I just had to utilize whatever I could to provide (for) my patients."

Mutia's grandfather passed away a few years later, and he left the Philippines in 1999 for Saudi Arabia, where he worked for seven years, including five

years at a humanitarian hospital in Riyadh, which was well-funded and equipped with all the newest tools and technology. Though his job had its perks, his personal life was changing. He and his wife, Tess, decided to start their family in Canada. It can take years for IENs to obtain their registration in Ontario. In 2008, the same year Mutia applied for registra-

tion, the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) received nearly 1,700 applications from internationally education RNs. Mutia's initial CNO assessment required him to complete another four-year degree. Discouraged, he explored job options elsewhere, but his wife's insistence kept him here. Then, he found an ad for the CARE Centre. He was thrilled to have access to financial support, advanced English classes geared toward nursing, and the promise of help

Over the last six years, he's gained his colleagues' respect as a passionate professional, mentor, and patient advocate. Mutia remains humble despite becoming *IEN of the Year*. He says providing excellent care just comes with the territory for nurses, adding his goal is to always ensure patients "...feel that their life is precious." **RN**

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