This summer, RNAO members were shocked by the sudden death of Past-President Joan Lesmond, who was diagnosed with stomach cancer in the spring. As president (2004–2006), Lesmond helped to launch the association’s Embracing Diversity Project, which led to RNAO’s first-ever statement on diversity. She was there – in person – when the federal government established the country’s first Health Accord in 2004. She hosted the association’s annual general meeting one year after a SARS outbreak prompted its cancellation for the first time in RNAO’s history.

“It’s my promise to the nurses of Ontario, and to the clients we all serve, that I will be a messenger for the marginalized.”

Joan Lesmond, 2004
During her tenure, nurses celebrated many milestones, including news that: a baccalaureate would become compulsory for nurses to practise in Ontario; mandatory retirement at 65 would be abolished; family health teams would become a part of the government’s commitment to primary health-care reform; and LHINs would begin providing health services closer to home. She also led RNAO when members passed “Resolution #1,” a difficult resolution that explored RNAO’s relationship with the Canadian Nurses Association.

Lesmond immigrated to Canada in 1970. She earned a BScN from Ryerson University and a master’s degree in community health nursing and doctorate in education – health policy from D’Youville College. She worked in community health care for more than three decades, most recently as Executive Director of Community Engagement at Saint Elizabeth Health Care (SEHC) and Executive Director of the SEHC Foundation. She was former chief nursing executive and director of professional practice at Toronto’s Casey House Hospice, worked with Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Clinic, was a director of Women’s College Hospital, chair of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, president of the Association of Ontario Health Centres, president of Regent Park Community Health Centre, chair and director of the Hospice Association of Ontario, and on the board for CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses.

In 2011, Lesmond received a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for health leadership. In 2010, she was recognized with a St. Lucian Governor-General Homecoming Award.