

BPGs improving care, advancing evidence-based practice



When Health Minister George Smitherman announced earlier this month that his government was hiring eight regional coordinators to implement RNAO's Best Practice

Guidelines (BPG) in long-term care homes, he signaled the government's recognition of – and commitment to – the two things RNAO's BPG program has been striving for since its inception six years ago: the full integration of evidence into everyday nursing practice and the full integration of evidence-based nursing care into everyday health policy. Both will undoubtedly result in improved patient care and outcomes.

This announcement signaled something else too: the government's recognition of the important work and unprecedented influence of the thousands of nurses – in all roles and sectors – who have been involved in the development, pilot testing, dissemination, uptake and evaluation of RNAO's 29 BPGs.

It is clear from Smitherman's commitment to use BPGs to achieve "improved quality of life for long-term care residents, more informed consumer participation, and higher standards of care," that RNAO's program is making a difference, and is influencing the policy directions and transformation agendas of Ontario's Liberal government. It is also clear that a program, with its beginnings under the financial backing of a different government, can survive a change in government and party if it is important to the system.

Indeed, the BPG Program began in 1999 under the leadership of then Minister of Health Elizabeth Witmer. The change in government in 2003 not only brought permanency to the BPG Program, but also

increased funding from Premier McGuinty and Smitherman. This demonstrates that good programs can transcend partisan politics.

While we celebrate this recognition and harness this influence to move forward, we must also celebrate the influence and importance of BPGs on other fronts. RNAO's BPGs are not only driving positive directions in government; they are improving the day-to-day care nurses provide in Ontario, Canada and abroad. And, they are contributing to positive change in universities and colleges across the province.

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Just look at the success of RNAO's BPG Champions Network, launched three years ago to improve understanding of the importance of BPGs, and to educate nurses on how to integrate BPGs into their daily practice to improve patients' health and clinical outcomes. By networking, sharing experiences, and building strong ties between organizations, these 519 Champions are influencing change at the point of care, and are generating enthusiasm and passion for evidence-based practice and best patient care.

BPGs cover the full breadth of nursing practice: from health promotion and disease prevention to restorative, curative and palliative nursing care; from clinical areas to relational ones. Guidelines range from dealing with obesity, post-partum depression and smoking cessation, to preventing and treating pressure ulcers, to client-centred care, to our newest program on healthy work environments. They are influential because of their quality, their relevance, and their applicability in all sectors of health care and with so many different populations – here at home and around the world.

Ontario's BPGs are reaching nursing communities nationally and internationally.

You will soon hear the results of a joint partnership with Linda Piazza and the Canadian Nurses Foundation that will see at least three organizations awarded funds to evaluate implementation of RNAO's BPG in jurisdictions outside of Ontario.

On the international scene, our guidelines are posted on the World Health Organization (WHO) Web site and on the Web sites of organizations such as evidencebasednursing.it in Italy. RNAO's 3rd bi-annual BPG international conference and our popular BPG Summer Institute (a full week of learning) attracted delegates from as far away as Australia, England, the Netherlands and Scotland.

As important as teaching our international partners has become, we haven't forgotten how vital it is to also teach nursing students right here at home. Eleven nursing programs in Ontario received \$10,000 each in 2004 to incorporate BPGs into curriculum. Some of those schools shared their amazing experiences at the BPG conference (see pg. 17). It's exciting to envision a health-care system in which so many new nursing graduates enter the workforce expecting, rather than wondering, if they will provide high quality patient care through BPGs. However, we must heed some nursing academics who worry that new grads must not lose sight of BPGs when they enter the workforce. There's still much work to be done to ensure BPGs are implemented in all workplaces across Ontario and around the world. Without implementation, patients will not get the quality care they deserve, and nurses will not practice to their fullest potential.

It's exciting to think about what we've achieved since 1999. It's even more exciting to think of what we can achieve in the years to come.

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