

Presentation by Board member Denise Wood before the Select Committee in Kingston on Thursday, May 21, 2015

Ms. Denise Wood: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My name is Denise Wood. I'm a registered nurse in Ontario, having practised for 45 years in many capacities: as an educator, administrator and in acute and emergency care. I have witnessed first-hand the outcomes of patients who have experienced different levels of sexual assault. I have also witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace. Currently, I am the region 9 representative on the board of directors for RNAO and also the treasurer of the Kingston chapter of RNAO. Region 9 includes Kingston and area, Lanark Leeds and Grenville, Champlain and Seaway chapters.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is a professional association representing registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students who practise in all roles and sectors in Ontario. Our mandate is to advocate for healthy public policy and the nursing role in enhancing the health of Ontarians. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated for healthy public policy, promoted excellence in nursing practice and influenced decisions that affect nurses and the public they serve.

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment as you look for ways to both prevent and improve our response to Ontarians who have experienced sexual violence and harassment. I also look forward to listening to the presentations of the many dedicated professionals from organizations across the region who work so diligently to support victims of sexual violence on a daily basis. The chapter executive of Kingston has reviewed the April 29 submission from RNAO to this committee and agrees wholeheartedly with the recommendations contained within the document, which include, but are not limited, to the following:

RNAO urges the governments of Ontario and Canada:

- to respect, support and fund aboriginal communities and organizations in implementation of the Aboriginal Sexual Violence Action Plan;
- to update and strengthen Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy with a detailed implementation plan, complete with targets and timelines, accompanied by substantive public investment; and

—to provide protected, sustained funding so that hospital-based sexual and domestic violence treatment centres have the staffing and other resources to provide 24/7 care that is excellent, appropriate and timely and consistent with best international practices and standards of care.

Implementation and ongoing revision of the 2015 health and physical education curriculum is critical to enable systemic, generational change.

RNAO supports investment in a creative engagement fund to provoke discussion of challenging issues, such as rape culture, consent, gender inequality and social norms through funding projects by Ontario artists.

As part of a larger initiative to transform rape culture, particular attention should be given to improve how the media report on sexual assault through such resources as Reporting on Sexual Assault: A Toolkit for Canadian Media.

Although the Occupational Health and Safety Act does include wording prohibiting reprisal by an employer, explicit and strong language to protect whistleblowers concerning incidents or potential incidents of violence and harassment and other threats to the health of the public would strengthen our health care system.

The Ministry of Labour should review the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include safety from emotional or psychological harm rather than merely physical harm, as part of the mandate of the ministry.

As part of strengthening health outcomes, quality of health care services, inter-professional care and addressing power imbalances, RNAO advocates amending the public health act to replace medical advisory committees with inter-professional advisory committees.

As the Kingston chapter of RNAO, our mandate is to offer registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students a variety of educational, in-service workshops. These initiatives are geared to enhancing and improving care to patients and clients.

The Kingston chapter has been recently active. since July 2014. One of our main objectives is to be open and transparent with nurses and other professionals. The chapter would be very interested in collaborating with agencies such as the sexual assault centre, Kingston police and others to

develop and deliver education on sexual violence and sexual harassment to our members.

Sexual violence can and does happen to anyone: people of all ages, genders, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and nationality.

Some of the most vulnerable in our communities are girls between the ages of six and 18. According to statistics available from Girls Inc. of Limestone, Algonquin and Lakeshore, 6,250 girls in their service area are likely to experience sexual abuse in their lifetime. And 80% of sexual abuse occurs in the home, 69% of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, and only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police.

In addition, 43% of teens 15 to 17 years of age say they were asked by someone on the Internet to meet in person, and one in five accepted. Eighty per cent of youth are connected to the Internet; 72% visit chat rooms, and many visit adult chat rooms or private rooms.

All people need to be provided with skills and strategies to protect themselves and be empowered to make change.

On behalf of Ontario's nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students, I thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before this committee. We'll be delighted to respond to any questions.