



## Powering nurses to strengthen health and health care in Ontario

WHEN YOU READ THE HEADLINE above, you may wonder if it's a typo, and if it should read "empowering" rather than "powering." The answer to that is no. I very purposefully use the word powering because I believe it more clearly conveys RNAO's goals as an association.

To empower someone means giving them more authority or making them more confident to do something. There's a sense of doing onto another person. This is not the type of association RNAO is or wants its members to be. Instead, we want members to be powered.

Florence Nightingale once said: "There is no magic in the word association...We must never forget that the 'individual' makes the association. What the association is depends on its members. A nurses' association can never be a substitute for the individual nurse. It is she who must, each in her own measure, give life to the association, while the association helps her."

This notion that RNAO supports its members – but it's the members who give life to RNAO – rings as true today as it did when Nightingale wrote this quote in 1859. Let's take a moment to translate her message into our context today.

To me, it means RNAO is here to power you to, in turn, power health and health care wherever you work and live. A contemporary example relates to [Queen's Park on the Road \(QPOR\)](#). RNAO powers members with evidence-based

backgrounders on topics for discussion. You then bring these backgrounders and your powerful perspectives into meetings with politicians.

Members across the province have been meeting with MPPs recently for QPOR (see page 24). The conversations focus on

**"IT IS MEMBERS WHO GIVE LIFE TO RNAO'S BACKGROUNDERS. IT IS YOU WHO LEAVES AN IMPRESSION ON YOUR MPP ABOUT THE URGENCY OF THESE ISSUES."**

top priorities for nurses, whether RNs, NPs or nursing students. And they build on the top priorities of RNAO.

It is members who give life to RNAO's backgrounders. It is you who leaves an impression on your MPP about the urgency of these issues. And it is you who can take pleasure in the long-term impact of your meetings when MPPs bring these issues to the legislature for discussion and debate.

Here are details from two QPOR visits in the words of those who organized, prepared for, and led those meetings in their own communities.

Hamilton RN Irene Molenaar got involved when she saw the email from QPOR co-ordinator Peta-gay (PG) Batten, inviting the assembly leaders to participate. Irene took it on because she feels "...nurses can make a huge difference by being politically

involved." She knew she made a difference when NDP MPP Monique Taylor wrapped up their meeting in October with a promise to "...bring the issues forward at Queen's Park." Irene followed up on the visit by sharing details with colleagues, and posting pictures on her own

Facebook feed as well as that of the Hamilton chapter. "Others then shared it around the nursing Facebook community," she says, adding "...it raises awareness about the issues we face."

Peterborough RN Jill Staples is a veteran QPOR organizer. She says her meeting with Liberal MPP Jeff Leal, minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs, went very well. Meetings with him in the community, she says, have been productive and have enabled her to develop a relationship with him that allows her to bring forward issues even between the formal QPOR meetings. Jill also met to discuss RNAO priorities with PC MPP Laurie Scott, who she always finds very receptive and supportive.

"We have major issues in Peterborough with a lack of mental health resources, homelessness and drug use,"

she says. A personalized meeting with Leal allowed her to "...seriously discuss the suicide rates, which are much higher here than in other areas of the province...I was able to provide examples and numbers," she says.

I would like to thank Irene and Jill for sharing their experiences and thoughts about QPOR. They are just two of numerous RNAO members who have been powered by RNAO, and who are living the words of Florence Nightingale.

On behalf of your board and home office staff, I want to also thank each and every one of our members for being leaders and harnessing the power to speak out for nursing and speak out for health.

Your values, anchored in leadership, informed by evidence, and fueled with courage, power you and all of us as a collective to do what's best for Ontarians. And we know that what's best for Ontarians is also best for RNs, NPs and nursing students. This is the reason our membership continues to thrive at 41,153 members strong.

We have grown substantively and will continue to grow thanks to the power of each and every one of you. **RN**

DORIS GRINSPUN, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD (HON), O.ONT, IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF RNAO.

Follow me on Twitter  
[@DorisGrinspun](#)