



A tour to remember

ONE OF THE THINGS I ENJOY MOST about representing you as president is the opportunity to travel and connect with you in your communities and to hear first-hand your issues and concerns.

This year, RNAO's annual fall tour took me to southwestern and northern Ontario.

Windsor-Essex was my first stop with an evening event hosted by the chapter. I had a chance to meet with RNs, NPs and students. Members underscored the need for more NPs in the community and the lack of RN employment opportunities, which is resulting in some new Ontario graduates going to the U.S. for work. Despite these challenges, I also heard heartwarming stories about the positive ways nurses support each other in their day-to-day work on interprofessional teams.

My next visit took me to Chatham-Kent. I began my day at St. Clair College, observing students in the simulation labs. I witnessed critical thinking, problem-solving and emerging leadership before my very eyes. During my visit, I also had the pleasure of meeting with the CEO and chief nursing executive (CNE) of the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance. From our discussions, it was very clear there is strong collaboration across the health system in this community.

I learned about the growing need for health and social services related to mental health

and addiction, the community's high level of unemployment, and how much nurses appreciate RNAO's focus on social determinants of health. I learned how NPs are reducing hospital

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emergency visits by checking up on residents in their homes. And I learned about the burnout rate among nurses, what to do about disengagement, and the effect that is having on nurses' willingness to preceptor students.

I used this visit to encourage those who are not yet RNAO members to get involved, connect with nursing colleagues, and re-energize through our collective advocacy, chapter work and interest groups.

You may recall that during last year's tour, despite my best efforts to travel to northern Ontario, the weather conspired against me and I could only get as far as Thunder Bay before being forced to turn back. This year, although it took two attempts due to fog, I did manage to visit North Bay and Kenora.

A group of Nipissing University nursing students greeted me when I arrived in North Bay, and I spent the evening meeting with them and other members of the local chapter. They shared insightful concerns about staffing

mix in long-term care, wage disparity, and recruitment concerns among RNs and NPs working in the community sector. They warned of the growing health disparities in

northern communities. The students also shared innovative strategies for recruiting and sustaining student members in RNAO, including the idea of offering a study group to support NCLEX exam preparation.

My final stop was Kenora. The drive from the Winnipeg airport to this city not only exposed me to some gorgeous landscape, but also the physical distance between northern towns and dispersed communities. Members spoke passionately about how they rely primarily on technology to engage in the educational and membership benefits of RNAO. I was reminded that a member coming to Toronto for a one-day event translated into three days away from work and family.

I assured members the association would continue to expand its use of technology to ensure active engagement and better access for members in northern and rural communities. During this visit, I also had the opportunity to meet with the

CNE of Lake of the Woods District Hospital. I was impressed to learn that numerous RNAO BPGs are being used across many clinical areas. The CNE expressed concern about the challenge and cost of providing and maintaining specialty clinical competence for RNs and NPs in rural community hospitals, especially in areas such as dialysis.

I spoke with RNs and NPs who work at the local family health team, and learned about the range of primary care and health promotion services they provide. I was amazed to hear about the means by which clients and patients have to travel from First Nations communities via snowmobile, boat and plane just to access services.

My final highlight was meeting with the health and wellness co-ordinator at Seven Generations Education Institute, an Indigenous academic centre. I applaud their efforts to ensure the nursing programs are culturally appropriate and honour the intent of Indigenous teachings.

I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to connect with so many of you. I want to thank members who planned these visits and accompanied me. It was truly a pleasure and worth every minute. **RN**

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