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Nursing Issues: General Statistics

Introduction

This fact sheet examines the following general statistics concerning nursing: numbers of nurses; where nurses are employed; age of nurses; the number of nurse educators. These issues are examined pertaining to:

- Registered Nurses (RN, Reg.N.). RNs (inclusive of Nurse Practitioners) represent the largest regulated health care provider group in Canada. Registered nurses must complete a nursing program either at a baccalaureate or diploma level and register with their respective provincial or territorial nursing regulatory body which permits them to perform the authorized functions of a registered nurse. All provinces and territories have RNs, who work in a variety of settings.
- Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN). LPNs are the second-largest regulated health profession in Canada. Prior to 1945, "auxiliary workers", as they were known, were employed and trained on the job to meet nursing service needs in hospitals and nursing homes. LPNs now receive theoretical and clinical education in one to two-year community college programs. Like RNs, all provinces and territories have LPNs, who work in a variety of settings.¹ In Ontario they are called Registered Practical Nurses. (Please see note in next paragraph)
- Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN). RPNs represent the largest single group of mental health professionals found in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia where they are a separate regulated health profession. (Note: LPNs in Ontario are called Registered Practical Nurses and the acronym should not be confused with Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) in the four western provinces). RPNs must complete an education program either at the diploma or baccalaureate level.

Numbers of Nurses

Registered Nurses

After strong growth in the 1980s, the number of RNs employed in nursing declined in the mid-1990s and has remained stable since that time. Between 1999 and 2002, the number of registrations fluctuated by less than 2,000 per year or 0.75%.²

Between 2002 and 2003, the combination of increased registrations and a decrease in the number of nurses who fail to state their employment status due to changes in data collection by the Canadian Institute of Health Information resulted in a one-year increase of 9,751 RNs for Ontario and Quebec, or 93.9% of the total increase of 10,385 RNs employed in nursing. Because of these two factors, comparisons between pre-2003 and 2003 data should be made with caution.



NUMBER OF REGISTERED NURSES, CANADA, 1999 - 2003

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Employed in Nursing | 228,534 | 232,566 | 231,512 | 230,957 | 241,342 |
| Employed in Other Than Nursing | 5,381 | 4,506 | 5,921 | 5,392 | 4,880 |
| Not Employed | 8,796 | 4,486 | 7,237 | 7,803 | 8,497 |
| Not Stated | 13,859 | 13,193 | 8,227 | 10,600 | 3,674 |
| Total RNs in Canada | 256,570 | 254,751 | 252,897 | 254,752 | 258,393 |
| Percent Employed in Nursing | 89.1 | 91.3 | 91.5 | 90.7 | 93.4 |

The number of RNs employed in nursing in Canada increased by 5.6% between 1999 and 2003, although much of this increase is due to methodological improvements in the data for Ontario and Quebec. Changes in the number of RNs employed in nursing were not uniform across the country. Prince Edward Island experienced the most substantial growth, and Ontario, Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon also experienced increases. Conversely, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut all have fewer RNs employed in nursing. (Data collection for Nunavut began only in 2001.)

In 2003, 82.5% of the RN workforce (excluding Quebec) lived in urban areas of Canada ranging from a high of 89.5% in British Columbia to a low of 39.3% in Nunavut.³

The ratio of RNs employed in nursing to the Canadian population is 1:131.⁴

Licensed Practical Nurses

Between 2002 and 2003⁵, the number of LPNs employed in practical nursing rose from 60,123 to 63,138, an increase of 5.0%. This is due primarily to two factors: 1) An increase in LPN registrations in Canada's four western provinces by 3.5%; and, 2) a methodological change to data from Ontario, resulting in a substantial decrease in the number of LPNs who fail to state their employment status from 7.5% (2,298) in 2002 to 0.01% 3) in 2003. This meant a one-year increase of 1,093 LPNs for Ontario despite the fact that the total number of registrations actually declined in that province for 2003. However, while the total number declined, a much greater proportion of LPNs are employed in nursing in this province, resulting in the workforce increase. With the exception of the Yukon and Newfoundland and Labrador, which experienced decreases, all jurisdictions within Canada experienced increases in the number of LPNs between 2002 and 2003.

In 2003, 72.4% of the LPN workforce lived in urban areas of Canada, ranging from a high of 93.1% in the Yukon to a low of 44.2% in the Northwest Territories.⁶

The ratio of LPNs employed in practical nursing to the Canadian population is 1:501.⁷



Registered Psychiatric Nurses

NUMBER OF REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES, CANADA, 2002 - 2003

| | 2002 | 2003 |
|---|-------|-------|
| Employed in Psychiatric Nursing | 5,132 | 5,107 |
| Not employed in psychiatric nursing | 9 | 7 |
| Not stated | 144 | 95 |
| Total RPNs in Canada | 5,285 | 5,167 |
| Percent employed in psychiatric nursing | 97.1% | 98.0% |

Between 2002 and 2003⁸, the number of RPNs practicing psychiatric nursing declined from 5,132 to 5,107. Despite the decline, a greater percentage of the total RPN workforce was employed in psychiatric nursing in 2003. Manitoba and British Columbia experienced decreases in their RPN workforce by 1.2% and 3.2% respectively, while Saskatchewan and Alberta experienced increases of 1.0% and 4.3% respectively.

In 2003, 79.6% of the RPN workforce lived in urban areas of Canada, ranging from a high of 93.0% in British Columbia to a low of 66.0% in Alberta. In that year, seven RPNs lived in the Northwest Territories.⁹

Where Nurses Are Employed

Registered Nurses

The percentage of RNs employed in hospitals remained stable over the past five years (63%). For the first time since 1999, the proportion of RNs employed in community settings declined, falling from 13.2% in 2002 to 12.9% in 2003. Employment in nursing homes and long-term care settings has declined each year since 1999, from 11.7% in 1999 to 10.5% in 2003.

RNs working in hospitals are, on average, younger (43.0 years) than RNs working in community health (45.4 years) or nursing homes and long-term care (47.9 years).

In 2003, 52.1% of RNs employed in hospitals worked full-time, 32.9% part-time and 9.7% were employed casually. Of those RNs employed in community health, 53.9% worked full-time, 28.2% part-time and 12.6% casual. In nursing homes and long-term care, 45.7% of RNs were employed full-time, 38.5% part-time and 11.5% casual.

RNs early in their careers are more likely to work in hospitals than RNs who graduated more than 20 years ago. While hospitals remain the most common employer for all RNs, those approaching the end of their careers are just as likely to work in other sectors.¹⁰

Licensed Practical Nurses

In 2003, on average across Canada, 46.8% of LPNs worked in hospitals, 6.1% in community health, 37.0% in nursing homes, and 7.8% in other settings. Concentrations of LPN employment vary across provinces and territories.¹¹



Registered Psychiatric Nurse

In 2003, on average across, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, 41.8% of RPNs worked in hospitals, 23.3% in a community health, 21.8% in nursing homes, and 12.4% in other settings. Concentrations of RPNs employment varied widely across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.¹²

Age of Nurses

Registered Nurses

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RNS BY AGE GROUP, CANADA, 2003

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| All RNs Employed in Nursing | 100.0 |
| - 25 years | 1.9 |
| 25 - 29 years | 7.2 |
| 30 - 34 years | 10.0 |
| 35 - 39 years | 13.1 |
| 40 - 44 years | 15.3 |
| 45 - 49 years | 17.5 |
| 50 - 54 years | 17.2 |
| 55 - 59 years | 11.4 |
| 60 - 64 years | 5.0 |
| 65 - 69 years | 1.0 |
| 70+ years | 0.2 |
| Not stated | <0.1 |

Canada is experiencing a significant shift in the age of its RN workforce. The numbers of RNs under age 45 continues to decline while the numbers age 45 and older continues to increase.

In 2003, for every RN aged 35 or less in Canada, there were 1.8 RNs aged 50 or older.

There are more nurses over the age of 50 than under age 35 in every province and territory except Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given this trend, it is not surprising that the average age of RNs in Canada has increased by 1.7 years between 1999 and 2003 from 42.8 years to 44.5 years.¹³

Licensed Practical Nurses

Canada's LPN workforce is also aging. While the distribution of LPNs across Canada varies widely by age, nonetheless each jurisdiction has a greater percentage of LPNs over the age of 50 than under age 35. For every LPN under 35, there are 1.8 LPNs age 50 or older. In 2003, the average age of LPNs in Canada is 44.4 years, an increase of 0.2 years since 2002.¹⁴



Registered Psychiatric Nurses

In 2003, at 46.2 years, the average age of RPNs across the four western provinces is higher than that of either RNs or LPNs; this is an increase of 0.5 years from 2002. The distribution by age of RPNs varies greatly across the western provinces. With the exception of Saskatchewan, there are nearly three RPNs over age 50 for every RPN under age 35 in the western provinces. Manitoba and Saskatchewan had the lowest percentage of RPNs over age 50 at 34.9% and 30.6% respectively, while Alberta and British Columbia had a higher percentage, at 38.8% and 46.4% respectively.¹⁵

Numbers of Nurse Educators

The number of nurse educators increased by approximately one-third from 1998 to 2002, despite a slight decline in 1999.¹⁶

Substantially more nurse educators had graduate degrees in 2002 than in 1998. The majority of this increase took place at the Master's level, with more modest increases at the Doctoral level.¹⁷

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS OF NURSING, 1998 - 2002

| HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total | 2531 | 2396 | 2771 | 3742 | 3351 |
| Post Doctoral in Nursing | 17 | 23 | 30 | 21 | 21 |
| Post Doctoral in Other Discipline | 16 | 29 | 70 | 18 | 15 |
| Doctoral in Nursing | 105 | 135 | 151 | 163 | 221 |
| Doctoral in Other Discipline | 214 | 200 | 175 | 284 | 251 |
| Master's in Nursing | 511 | 660 | 728 | 976 | 812 |
| Master's in Other Discipline | 409 | 470 | 697 | 715 | 822 |
| Nurse Practitioner | | | 1 | 59 | 55 |
| Baccalaureate in Nursing | 1007 | 759 | 794 | 1361 | 1177 |
| Baccalaureate in Other Discipline | 45 | 104 | 76 | 101 | 75 |
| No Degree | 141 | 16 | 16 | 44 | 95 |
| Not Stated | 66 | | 33 | | 7 |

GRADUATES FROM NURSING MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMS IN CANADA, 1998 - 2002

| GRADUATES | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Master's | 222 | 248 | 218 | 303 | 336 |
| Doctoral | 18 | 33 | 10 | 20 | 18 |



More nursing students educated in Canada pursued Master's degrees between 1998 and 2002. However, the number of students pursuing Doctoral degrees, while showing fluctuations during this time, remained stagnant.¹⁸

Endnotes

1. Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). Licensed Practical Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada, 2002, 2003, p. 36.
2. CIHI. Registered Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Nurses in Canada, 2002, 2003, p.p. 44 - 45.
3. CIHI. Registered Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p.p. 14 - 16.
4. CNA. Highlights of 2003 Nursing Statistics (population of 31,660,466 from the 2001 Census) p. 1.
5. CIHI only began its data collection for LPNs starting with the year 2002.
6. CIHI. Licensed Practical Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p. 10 - 11.
7. Population of 31,660,466 from the 2001 Census.
8. CIHI only began its data collection for RPNs starting with the year 2002.
9. CIHI. Registered Psychiatric Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p.p. 11 - 12.
10. Registered Psychiatric Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada, 2002, 2003, p. 37 - 38.
11. Licensed Practical Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p. 26.
12. Registered Psychiatric Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p. 25.
13. Registered Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p.p. 19 - 20.
14. Licensed Practical Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Licensed dPractical Nurses in Canada, 2002, p.p. 42 - 43.
15. Registered Psychiatric Nurses Database: Workforce Trends of Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada, 2003, 2004, p.p. 14 - 16.
16. Data is from Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, National Student and Faculty Survey of Canadian Schools of Nursing, 2002 - 2003. Data for the 2003 - 2004 survey will not be released until the spring of 2005.
17. Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing. "Table 6: Highest Level of Education of Faculty Members, Canadian Schools of Nursing, 1998 - 2002," National Student and Faculty Survey of Canadian Schools of Nursing, 2002 - 2003.
18. CASN, Adaption of "Table 5: Degree Programs in Canadian Schools of Nursing, 1998 - 2002: Admissions, Enrolment and Graduates by Type of Nursing Program," National Student and Faculty Survey of Canadian Schools of Nursing, 2002 - 2003.