

Behind the Front Lines

A recap/critical look at health care news and the reality behind the reporting from the viewpoint of front-line Ontario registered nurses

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Nurses and the Provincial Election



Premier Dalton McGuinty will hear from RNs about their priorities during the upcoming election.

The 2011 provincial election is less than 10 months away now and ONA and its members are considering the issues they wish to ask candidates.

RNs have experienced a very difficult couple of decades in Ontario, a trend that continues. Throughout the Mike Harris "Common Sense Revolution" of the mid-1990s until now, registered nurses continue to be viewed as simply the biggest expense for health care

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The Jailhouse Nurse Paradox

A new University of Toronto study has found a paradox amongst jailhouse nurses ([source](#)).

Despite facing sexual taunts, death threats and other daily struggles, nurses working in Canada's correctional facilities have lower levels of burnout than RNs working in hospitals and other sectors.

Canada has about 500 jailhouse nurses caring for almost 9,000 inmates in 30 facilities. The study, led by Joan Almost and Diane Doran, found that these nurses have less control over their practice, less access to resources and experience higher levels of emotional abuse. Yet only four per cent report physical abuse on the job.

By contrast, a survey conducted by the Ontario Nurses' Association of members found that 36 per cent had experienced some form of physical abuse in the workplace, mostly at the hands of cognitively impaired patients.

Interestingly, one side effect of the lack of resources that jailhouse nurses experience is that they are forced to draw on a wide range of their expertise.

The researchers have concluded that ensuring a "positive working environment for these nurses and ensuring that they're satisfied with their jobs helps with recruitment and retention."



What is ONA?

The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is the union representing 55,000 front-line RNs and allied health professionals and more than 12,000 nursing student affiliates providing care in Ontario hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, industry and clinics.



Who is Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN?

ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN (pictured), is a veteran renal transplant nurse who is an expert spokesperson on a range of issues. Linda is available to comment on everything from workplace violence, patient care, health care policy in Ontario, the flu pandemic, nursing cuts, public health and much more. Simply contact ONA's media relations officer, Sheree Bond, at (416) 964-8833, ext. 2430 if you would like to interview Linda on a health-related issue.

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Nurses and the Provincial Election

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facilities and therefore are the first to be cut when budgets are tight. Since late 2008, Ontario health care facilities have cut more than 2,550 RN positions.

RNs in Ontario have three overarching priorities: keep RNs working to protect patient care; invest in a culture of workplace safety to protect quality patient care; and invest in rebuilding public health care to protect quality patient care.

As nurses, ONA members' first priority is always the patient. The impact of the current outbreak of influenza is proof of what ONA has spoken about – cutting nurses, cutting services and closing beds does not – contrary to what hospital media releases always say – “improve care” but rather leaves the system vulnerable with no “surge capacity.”

That lack of surge capacity is what's currently leaving hospitals in parts of Ontario scrambling to find beds for the surge in patients needing to be admitted with complications from the flu. It's causing some elective surgeries to be cancelled, and in the case of London hospitals, causing wait times in the ER to be up to 30 hours.

Watch for ONA's election priorities to be launched more formally later in the year.

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Turmoil Continues at Hotel-Dieu



More than five years after the workplace murder of Lori Dupont, RN, Windsor's Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital turmoil continues.

More than five years after ONA member Lori Dupont, RN was murdered while working in the recovery room of Windsor's Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital, the turmoil has continued at the troubled facility.

Headlines out of Windsor continue on an almost daily basis ([source-1](#) and [source-2](#)) and demonstrate the chaos that must exist. Hotel-Dieu has long been of concern to ONA and its members. Over the years, ONA has spoken to the media about:

- The lack of a culture of safety that led to the workplace murder of Lori Dupont, RN;

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Study Says Foreign Caregivers a Temporary Measure

Toronto Star columnist Carol Goar has written an insightful piece on the results of a new study on foreign caregivers ([source](#)).

The International Organization for Migration, a Geneva-based agency, has released the study that looks at four western countries – including Canada – and how they are handling the need for caring for an aging population.

As Goar notes, Canadian-born workers do not want jobs in this sector because the pay is low, shifts brutal and caring for the elderly can be physically and emotionally draining.

Consequently, the number of foreign caregivers entering Canada has increased by 400 per cent over the last decade. Nursing homes, retirement homes, home care agencies and private nursing companies are turning to Asia and the Caribbean as their top sources of caregivers.

The International Organization for Migration study found that using foreign workers for elder care is simply a stop-gap solution and that is what is needed is an “overhaul.”

The Role of Migrant Care Workers in Aging Societies found that the “increasing reliance can be seen as a symptom of the structural and funding challenges our social systems are experiencing.”

In the next Behind the Front Lines:

Evidence emerges of quality gap between public and private-sector providers.

OMA pushes for more private clinics.

Turmoil Continues at Hotel-Dieu Grace

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- The continuing lack of safety and security that resulted in three registered nurses being violently attacked by a psychiatric patient at the hospital; ONA believes the hospital's policy of not replacing sick calls and its lifting of previous security measures in the unit left the RNs vulnerable;
- The failure of the hospital to address a continuing culture of “physician dominance” that came to light during a coroner's jury inquest into Lori Dupont's murder;
- The decision of the board of directors of Hotel-Dieu to not endorse the coroner's jury recommendations flowing from the Dupont case.

Now, former Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital CEO Ken Deane has been appointed by the province as supervisor. Deane is assistant deputy minister of health and was CEO of Hotel-Dieu from 2002 to 2004. He will have the power to dissolve the hospital board and remove CEO Warren Chant if he finds it necessary.

Chant has been accused by former hospital spokesperson Kim Spirou of asking her to lie to the media; Spirou is suing Hotel-Dieu for \$3.3 million, alleging wrongful dismissal.

The final element of this “perfect storm” of chaos is the action taken by the Religious Hospitaliers of St. Joseph – the founders of Hotel-Dieu more than a century again – to remove long-term hospital board chair Egidio Sovran.

Health Minister Deb Matthews went as far as speaking to the media about the Religious Hospitaliers of St. Joseph, publicly stating that the supervisor of Hotel-Dieu answers to no one but the health ministry. It will be an interesting process unfolding in Windsor as Deane works to restore a healthy workplace culture.

Most recently, a coroner's investigation was announced into the suicide of a patient who'd just been assessed and discharged by Hotel-Dieu ([source](#)). The hospital says it has conducted its own internal investigation and is confident that it followed the proper procedures.

UNDER THE RADAR

News the Media is Missing

Peterborough Health Coalition Looks for Proof

Health care reporters are often frustrated at the difficult process of interviewing sources in health care because of the high standard of “patient confidentiality” law. This has been a frustration for ONA as well – especially when, as noted last month, hospitals say again and again that cuts to RN positions will not impact patient care.

In Peterborough, the Chair of the local chapter of the Ontario Health Coalition has now created a new way to get the “real stories” of what many believe is a decline in patient care at Peterborough Regional Health Centre since major staffing cuts were implemented to balance the budget.

Roy Brady has placed a dedicated mailbox at Peterborough City Hall ([source](#)) and urged the community to write their stories of health care received at the hospital and will bring them to hospital officials.

Peterborough Regional has been hard hit by budget woes; more than 150 registered nurses (to date) have been cut in an attempt to balance the hospital's budget and eliminate a deficit. Brady and the Health Coalition are highly skeptical that the cuts will have no effect on the quality of patient care – as hospital officials say.

Brady reports that the mailbox has been an immediate success and that he's already received stories of less-than-ideal health care experiences.

Looking for the real story?

Speak to front-line nurses!

The Ontario Nurses' Association has a whole host of experts in health care. ONA members work in hospitals, long-term care, public health, the community and industry and can answer your questions as health continues to evolve in this province.

Need a reliable and informed source? Contact ONA.


www.ona.org



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