The Importance of the Ontario Nurses’ Association for Nurses

Nursing has historically always been a dynamic profession; however, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly thrust nurses into unchartered, confusing, and dangerous territory. In speaking with my sister (a nurse) and other nurses, I learned that they have been bombarded with fast-changing policies and updates. However, one constancy has been the unrelentling support from ONA. ONA’s actions have been rooted in the fair, safe treatment of nurses, especially during this now year-long pandemic. For example, ONA has gone through extensive lengths to protect nurses in long-term care homes (LTCHs), which have been disproportionately and tragically affected by this pandemic. Significantly, in April 2020, ONA’s actions resulted in rulings by the Superior Ontario Court which have made it mandatory for several LTCHs to provide the proper PPE that nurses and health care professionals require to protect themselves and their residents. ONA has also continued to advocate for improved conditions within LTCHs; this is evidenced by ONA calling on the provincial government to immediately implement the recommendations delineated in the Long-term Care COVID-19 Final Report released in April 2021. Beyond LTCHs, ONA has also advocated for the protection of all registered nurses, registered practical nurses, nurse practitioners, and other healthcare professionals in the province by repeatedly calling on the government to mandate that these professionals don the highest level of PPE to protect them from airborne COVID-19.

In addition to their strides towards improving working conditions, ONA has tirelessly advocated for the fair compensation of nurses and other health care workers during this pandemic. ONA has lobbied for all health-care workers to receive the pandemic premium, and ONA has been calling for the repeal of Bill 124—introduced in November 2019, this bill imposes disproportionate wage restraints on nurses’ compensation by limiting wage increases to
a maximum of 1% total compensation for 3 years, and effectively widens the gender gap by targeting predominantly female professionals. Recently, at the end of May, ONA members gathered with nursing leaders, healthcare union leaders, and politicians via Zoom to discuss the importance and urgency of appealing this bill.

Moreover, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, ONA has made monumental achievements in supporting nurses working in all areas, along every chapter of their nursing journey. ONA’s efforts for student nurses include the abolishment the 3-write maximum for the NCLEX, and continuous correspondences with stakeholders to voice student concerns regarding clinical placements. More recently, ONA has collaborated with the Ontario Minister of Health, Minister of Postsecondary Education, and Provincial Chief of Nursing Officer to ensure that nursing students are able to safely access in-person clinical placements during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that they have placements that accommodate their individual needs (e.g., individual health status, financial needs). As I am a student starting my placement in the midst of multiple outbreaks in my local area, knowing that ONA is supporting my safety grants me immense peace of mind. On the opposite end of the spectrum, ONA has also clearly supported more experienced nurses. ONA’s support for experienced nurses is clear in ONA’s outraged response to many employers’ decisions to lay off nurses or offer early retirement packages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, ONA is dedicated to supporting nurses even outside of their work environments. ONA provides a myriad of invaluable resources, such as mental health support programs, insurance plans, legal assistance, and various workshops to aid in the continuing education of nurses. Through all of these programs, ONA helps develop healthy, supported, and well-rounded nurses.
I am grateful to step foot into my nursing career with the backing of a union that will unequivocally value myself and my colleagues. Knowing that I will always have ONA’s fierce support makes me more excited to enter nursing; this excitement will allow me to always strive to be the best nurse that I can be. Through its tireless efforts, ONA is pivotal in optimizing quality of work-life for all nurses—that is, ensuring that workplaces are safe, that workplaces are empowering, and that nurses are appreciated and respected. This all empowers nurses to provide excellent health care. In doing so, ONA is not only instrumental in supporting Ontario’s nurses, but also in supporting the health of Ontario.

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