The Importance of the Ontario Nurses’ Association for Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare workers are the backbone of society. The Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA) plays a vital role in advocating for these workers so they can provide high-quality care to their patients. First, ONA advocates for healthcare professionals to ensure that they are treated safely and fairly. ONA is easily accessible to all members so workers can voice their concerns and the union can advocate for them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of this advocation increased, specifically due to the increased need to ensure the personal safety of workers. ONA has and continues to play a vital role in ensuring the well-being of its front-line workers. This advocation enables all healthcare professionals to provide their patients with high-quality care. Being a healthcare worker is gruelling, but ONA works to remove this pressure from their workers by ensuring their welfare professionally and personally.

As all people do, healthcare workers often get caught up in the busy day-to-day duties of their job and personal life. Most nurses work over 40 hours a week and have families, side-hustles, or other commitments to keep up with. Consequently, they do not have the time, energy, or knowledge of how to advocate for themselves. This is why ONA was established. ONA is a union that advocates for healthcare professionals so they can focus on the more important things, like providing patients with the care they deserve. The union’s advocation begins with that of fair pay for its workers. Contracts are negotiated by ONA to ensure that every worker gets what they deserve. Bargaining updates are posted periodically on ONA’s website to ensure that everyone is up to date with the progression of these contracts. This advocation also ensures that all healthcare professionals under their union are treated equitably. Without the advocation of ONA, workers would not be able to provide the highest-quality of care to their patients.

The accessibility of ONA to its workers is what makes them so effective in advocating for the fair treatment of their members. They hold town hall meetings that all members can attend. Within organizations, ONA has representatives who are accessible to the members. Members can also pick up their phone at anytime and give the union a call. These are methods that healthcare workers under ONA can use to voice their concerns. When concerns are voiced, they are dealt with by ONA so employees can
focus on their jobs. In this way, ONA provides a “safety net” to workers. The union is always there to “catch” the worker while they are “falling” by addressing concerns to protect the worker. In addition, ONA’s website has many accessible resources someone may need when dealing with difficult situations in the workplace. This includes resources for education, mental health, and emotional support. For example, ONA has resources on their website with instructions on how to foster a safe and inclusive work environment. With this accessibility, all healthcare workers within ONA can receive the accommodations they need to provide their patients with high-quality care.

The importance of ONA’s advocation for their healthcare workers has become more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Imagine being a nurse working in a hospital during March of 2020, terrified of what the virus could do to you and your family. From providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensuring safe working environments and hours, having ONA to advocate for you would greatly decrease the toll that the pandemic takes on your mental and physical health. Since the pandemic began, the safety of workers has become more important than ever. Due to the crowded hospitals, less staff, higher caseloads, and longer hours, healthcare workers have less time than they did before to advocate for their personal safety. ONA ensures that all workers are supplied with the PPE they need to keep themselves safe. During the pandemic, healthcare workers are in demand and, as a result, many nurses are being overworked. Luckily the union is always one call away. If ONA’s members feel that they are being overworked, they can call the union who will advocate for them. Further, in some cases during the pandemic, Ontario doctors who stepped in to support nursing shifts were paid almost ten times more than nurses. Nurses were equally at risk and overworked, however, saw little or no increase in pay. Thankfully, many of these nurses had ONA to fight for them, so they could focus on their essential work, while ONA advocated for their fair pay, treatment, and safety.

As a future nursing student, having ONA to support me eases my stress, especially since I will be beginning my education in the midst of a pandemic. During the pandemic, many nursing students lost out on valuable clinical placement opportunities, which were replaced by virtual placements and labs. ONA quickly recognized that these virtual experiences could not replace valuable in-person placements. They
are working to develop a plan and fighting to get nursing students back to in-person placements safely. I recognize the importance of real-life experience to my nursing education and feel thankful that thanks to ONA, I will be able to experience these opportunities myself.

The Ontario Nurses’ Association is essential in ensuring that healthcare workers across Ontario can do their jobs to the best of their abilities. They play a vital role in advocating for the safe and fair working conditions of their employees. The accessibility of ONA to healthcare workers around Ontario guarantees that all employees can have their concerns voiced and addressed. Lastly, during the pandemic, ONA has played a vital role in ensuring the welfare of their employees. These extenuating circumstances have made it even more difficult for employees to advocate for themselves, but ONA has supported them throughout the difficult times. With the assurance of safe, fair, and equitable treatment, employees can focus on their jobs. This includes providing patients with the high-quality care that they expect and deserve. The Ontario Nurses’ Association plays a life-changing role in not only the lives of its members, but indirectly to patients across Ontario.