

Initiative to support NEI in northern Ontario

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Conflict of interest declaration: No conflict of interest.

WHEREAS, health-care organizations in rural, remote and/or northern parts of Ontario face significant barriers in recruiting nurses and research has shown that nursing students who have the opportunity to do clinical education placements in those parts of the province are more likely to seek out employment opportunities in those areas and;

WHEREAS, the cost of travel and accommodation are significant barriers to student nurses being able to do clinical education placements in rural, remote and/ or northern parts of the province;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the RNAO actively lobby the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and/or Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to establish a rural, remote and/ or northern education initiative to augment the Nursing Education Initiative to provide reimbursement for travel and accommodation costs associated with pursuing clinical education placements in those parts of the province.

Background Information

The 2015 RNAO report on Ontario's Rural, Remote and Northern Nursing Workforce outlined the many barriers faced by health-care employers in these geographic areas when attempting to recruit nurses. Research has shown that when nursing students have the opportunity to do education placements in rural, remote and/or northern locales, they are much more open to seeking employment in these areas post-graduation (Spiers and Harris, 2015). A significant barrier to that type of educational experience is the substantial costs associated with travel and accommodation. For example, the lowest price for regular gasoline in Toronto on Dec. 20/2016 was 96.9 cents per litre and the price in Sioux Lookout on that same day was \$1.29.9 per litre.

One of the recommendations of the RNAO report specifically addressed that barrier:

Recommendation #12: That the Ministry of Health...”establish a rural nursing education initiative to augment the Nursing Education Initiative to provide reimbursement for tuition and transportation/accommodation costs associated with pursuing education.”

To date, there has been no action on the part of the Ministry of Health to act on this recommendation. In the meantime, other health-care students such as student physicians and physician assistant students receive funding to offset the cost of their travel and accommodations for education placements in these same rural, remote and /or northern parts of Ontario. It should also be noted that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities also has a role to play in supporting education for Ontario students in all areas of the province.

This lack of equal funding fails to address the important role that nurses play in the delivery of health care in these already underserved parts of the province.

Furthermore, nursing education programs are currently struggling to arrange appropriate clinical placements for large numbers of nursing students at teaching hospitals and large urban community

hospitals due to the increased student intake. Ministry of Health and/or Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities supported, and funded, placements in rural, remote and/or rural parts of the province might attract some students to these unique clinical opportunities that they might not otherwise consider.

As noted in the RNAO (2015) report, "...exposure to rural, remote and northern practice through clinical placements can promote recruitment" and "... sustainable health human resource workforce is critical towards improving access to care and health outcomes (pg. 9).

The Lakehead Chapter of RNAO is particularly knowledgeable regarding the barriers to nursing education and nurse recruitment in rural, remote and/or northern parts of Ontario and this is why the chapter is bringing this resolution forward to the 2017 Annual General Meeting.

References:

Coming Together, Moving Forward: Building the next chapter of Ontario's Rural, Remote and Northern Nursing Workforce Report, RNAO, April 2015.

Spiers, MC and Harris, M. Challenges to student transition in allied health undergraduate education in the Australian rural, remote context: A synthesis of barriers and enablers. Rural and Remote Health, 15, (2) Article 3069. ISSN 1445-6354 (2015)