A high proportion of currently employed nurses are going to retire in the next 10 years, but whether or not there will be enough replacements for them remains to be seen, says Linda Monk, president of the Essex Chapter of the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario and director of In-Patient Services at Hotel Dieu Grace Hospital.

“Currently, about 25 per cent of those employed as nurses who are in Essex County actually work outside of this area – primarily in Michigan. The inability to find full-time work has been a strong motivator to send resumes beyond Essex County, she says.”

According to statistics released by the College of Nurses of Ontario, only about 65 per cent of those employed are full-time. Monk says that number needs to change.

“Canadian nurses are choosing to work in the United States,” she says. “Years ago, there were no incentives and people started the trend of searching for work in the U.S. We cannot afford to fit that kind after again. Once they leave, there’s very little chance they will come back.”

The fact, she says, is that Monik, many don’t want to leave the area. “But they need to work full-time jobs. They don’t want to work three part-time ones to earn their income.”

It would be an even more desperate pill for nurses to swallow given statistics that show the profession most admired by young people is one of the least paid, she says. A LaPere survey indicated that 94 per cent of Ontario politicians said they trust nurses. Doctors ranked fourth at 90 per cent. Both have ranked in the top 10 for the past four years. A few factors may begin to sway things in favour of convincing Canadian nurses to forego a U.S. career. First, the soaring value of the Canadian dollar, which recently broke 90 cents U.S. for the first time since 1977, means that the income earned in the U.S. is falling.

Second, the Ontario government has made a commitment to hire 8,800 full-time nurses before the next provincial election – a move which would go far in solving not only the issue of keeping nurses in Canada, but of providing proper health care services to the public.

“So far, they’ve hired between 3,000 and 4,000 full-time nurses,” says Monik. “What we’re looking for is a ratio of 70 per cent of our nurses employed full-time. We’re not there yet but progress is being made.”

“Having full-time nurses is something that benefits the public,” she continues. “It means a greater continuity of care. If you’re in the hospital, it’s likely that you’ll have a different nurse every day. You’re entrusting your care to someone you don’t know when you’re there – we want to ensure that you have the most positive experience possible. If a situation has a chance to get to know you and your needs in terms of pain management, nausea, etc., there’s a far better chance that your treatment will be safer and better.

Nurses ultimately are in the people business, says Monk. “Our critical thinking will help you care for the doctor’s eyes and ears when they’re not in the hospital. Therefore, if we don’t have skilled nurses replacing us as we begin to retire, who will do this?”

The numbers of graduates are not enough to fill the places that will open up, she says. “It’s a hard job – it can be very physical and some people decide that early retirement is their preference.”

According to a Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) study, there will be a shortfall of 7,800 nurses by 2011 and 113,000 by 2016. To attract people to the profession, the ability to offer full-time employment is essential, says Monik. “This area is even more dependent on people who are trained here to be filled by an easier.”

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“People are living longer now – they come to the hospital with more than one ailment which makes their treatment more complex. It’s a challenge for nurses,” says Monik.

“People don’t have the resources to do everything we’d like to. But nurses and doctors remain very committed to patient care – working long hours, some even overnight unpaid. Without that commitment, the system would collapse.”

As the large population of Baby Boomers ages, the demand for geriatric nursing will increase.

FACTS AND FIGURES*

• In 1981, there were 254,752 registered nurses (RNs) in Canada. In 2012, there were 358,752 RNs in Canada.
• just over five per cent of nurses are male.
• most practicing RNs are employed in hospitals (79 per cent). Other major places of employment include nursing homes, community health centres, homes for the aged, educational institutions and physicians’ offices.
• according to a Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) study, there will be a shortfall of 7,800 nurses by 2011 and 113,000 by 2016.
• fall of 2011, nurses occupy 70 per cent of RN positions in the Canadian population in 2002 was the nurse to every 356 people.

- *Canadian Nurses Association

Nursing Opportunities

- move to Nursing courses to grow to advance and to change your career direction. Whatever your interest – working with children, scientific procedures and high-tech equipment, teaching and promoting healthy practices, directing health services and clinical secrets – you can be part of the health-care field – making a difference for you. There are just a few examples.

IN THE COMMUNITY:

- health clinics
- wellness programs in the workplace
- doctors’ offices
- home care
- hospice care
- palliative care centers
- mental and well baby clinics
- rehabilitation centers
- sexually transmitted disease units
- AIDS lozenges

IN A HOSPITAL:

- emergency
- intensive care
- coronary care units
- post-surgery
- pediatric units
- cardiovascular (heart)
- oncology (cancer)
- psychiatry
- pediatrics (children)
- obstetrics (pregnancy)
- gynecology (women’s health)

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