

Opening Doors to Nursing Degrees

A Proposal from Ontario's Colleges

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Summary

The problem

Ontario needs to expand nursing education options to improve access to the nursing profession, create better pathways amongst all nursing occupations, and build Ontario's capacity to meet the province's long-term nursing needs.

The opportunity

Ontario's colleges are capable of playing a larger role within a long-term provincial strategy for sustaining and renewing the nursing workforce. Colleges have the ability to reach out to prospective students from diverse backgrounds who have the potential to be successful in nursing degree programs. Many colleges are geographically located where there is a need for expanded access to nursing education.

Ontario's vision for meeting the future need for baccalaureate-prepared nurses should include a range of options, such as stand-alone university programs, stand-alone college programs, and collaborative college-university programs. This means a regulatory change is needed to authorize colleges to grant the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Any college wishing to grant this degree would be required to meet national accreditation standards established by the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), as well as the requirements of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB).

Why colleges?

Ontario's colleges have the experience, capacity and willingness to help meet the long-term need to sustain and renew the nursing workforce.

Colleges are offering high-quality baccalaureate degree programs in nursing today in collaboration with universities. They now have a decade of experience in delivering degree-level education and in participating in the CASN professional accreditation reviews. In some collaborations, the college provides 90 per cent or more of the actual instruction.

Colleges have a strong track record in serving students who are not well-served by other institutions. Low- and middle-income students, aboriginal students, francophone students, students with disabilities and students from small communities are all more likely to enter college than university.

Colleges are committed to creating new pathways for potential students who are already in the workplace. Colleges have been leaders in offering programs to support Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) who wish to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Colleges would also like to offer more flexible opportunities for nursing students, within the standards of CASN accreditation requirements.

College nursing faculty are well-prepared to teach at the baccalaureate level. With rare exceptions, all full-time nursing faculty at colleges hold a graduate degree. An increasing number hold a graduate degree in nursing, while others may hold a graduate degree in other disciplines and have many years of experience in the profession and in teaching nursing.

All college nursing programs are engaged in scholarly activity, and several colleges have active research programs funded in part by external grants. Many nursing programs have adopted a model of scholarship that integrates research, synthesis, practice, and teaching, as endorsed by CASN. The scholarly community in these colleges can provide an appropriate academic context for nursing degree studies.

Joining with other jurisdictions

British Columbia and Manitoba have authorized select colleges to offer four-year baccalaureates in nursing. Graduates from these programs will meet the same national standards for entry to the nursing profession as students who have attended university.

The Ontario Labour Mobility Act, 2009, requires Ontario to accept nurses who have graduated from college degree programs in other provinces if they seek to register as nurses in Ontario.

Why should current policies change?

Colleges have offered the majority of Ontario's nursing education programs for almost 40 years. The former government amended the nursing registration regulation in 2000 to require that new entrants to the nursing profession hold a "baccalaureate degree in nursing granted by a university." Colleges that offered diploma programs in nursing were required to terminate these programs and form collaborations with universities, so that new graduates could obtain university degrees. This change provided an opportunity to blend the nursing education expertise of college and university programs, and it provided access to nursing degree programs in communities that did not have a university.

Over the past decade, colleges have become an accepted part of Ontario's strategy for making high-quality degrees accessible to more students. Select colleges today offer more than 50 four-year baccalaureate programs in non-nursing, career-oriented fields of study. They are, however, excluded by regulation from offering degrees in nursing.

Many of the collaborations that were established to support the new educational requirement for registered nurses in 2000 have benefited both institutions, the profession, and the health-care system. In some partnerships, considerable capacity-building has taken place within the college and several colleges are now prepared to seek degree-granting authority. Ontario now has the potential to support different options for nursing degree delivery, while adhering to national quality standards.

What the Ontario government can do?

As part of the long-term evolution of Ontario's postsecondary education system, the government should amend the current registration regulation so that new entrants to the nursing profession can hold a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree granted by either a college or a university. This means that future students will have the option of pursuing a nursing degree at a university, a college, or a collaborative college-university program.

To protect the quality of students' programs, the government should collaborate with postsecondary institutions involved in nursing education to establish future targets for annual admissions to nursing baccalaureate programs, and it should fully fund spaces in these programs. Continuing consultation with nursing programs will assist in meeting future needs.

What colleges will do?

Colleges will help meet Ontario's need for nurses based on two principles:

- **Maintaining national quality standards:** Some colleges will seek to offer their own baccalaureate nursing degrees while others will prefer to continue their current collaborative programs. Regardless of which path they choose, all colleges will continue to meet CASN's national accreditation standards. Colleges that seek to offer their own degrees recognize that it will be their responsibility to meet CASN accreditation standards and PEQAB requirements and maintain degree-level admission standards.
- **Improving accessibility and creating new pathways for students:** Colleges want to work with the government and the universities to plan how many nursing degree spaces for students are needed and how they will be accommodated. Some colleges will choose to expand, while others will maintain current enrolment. Colleges will create more pathways so that students from a variety of backgrounds have opportunities to complete a nursing baccalaureate degree, while upholding the high standard of quality required for accreditation.

Moving ahead

Educating more Registered Nurses (RNs) will be an important element of Ontario's strategy for addressing health human resources needs. Now is the time to develop plans for expanding high-quality nursing education.

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Building on the HealthForceOntario Strategy

Through its HealthForceOntario strategy, the government has taken significant steps to ensure the right supply and mix of health-care professionals.

The HealthForceOntario strategy has created new and innovative health-care roles, recruited health-care workers to Ontario, provided bridging programs for internationally educated professionals, expanded medical school enrolments, created interprofessional Family Health Teams, opened a new school of pharmacy, and introduced the Nursing Graduate Guarantee. More than 6,000 additional Registered Nursing (RN) positions were created in the period 2004 to 2008, bringing the total number of RNs working in Ontario to 92,000.

These initiatives have been integral to improving the quality of health care and providing better access to health-care professionals.

One element of the HealthForceOntario strategy has been to educate more nurses. The number of graduates from entry-to-practice nursing programs in Ontario reached 2,800 in 2008. This represents a 57 per cent increase since 2004 and has restored the annual number of graduations to the level of the 1980s, after a dramatic decline in the late 1990s.¹ This could not have been accomplished without the joint efforts of the government, colleges and universities.

The problem

Meeting future health-care needs will require strategies that respond to regional and community needs. There will be a need to support diversity and expand pathways for existing health-care providers who wish to pursue further education and advance their careers.

- **Geography:** Demand for nurses will be strong in the province's fast-growing urban areas. There will also be pressures in rural areas where the concentration of seniors is highest. By 2021, seniors will account for more than 20 per cent of the population in many counties in northern, eastern and southwestern Ontario.²
- **High-needs populations:** Aboriginal communities have particular difficulty recruiting and retaining nurses. The unique needs of individuals with mental health problems, chronic and co-morbid conditions and effects of poverty must be met.
- **Diversity:** The nursing profession requires a distinctive range of intellectual, academic, technical, personal, and interpersonal attributes. Given the diversity of our province, more diversity is required within the profession to ensure respect for differences. Nursing education programs must seek out a broader range of students while ensuring that they meet the admission requirements. More needs to be done to create opportunities for students from under-represented groups, including students who are

¹ Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing and Canadian Nurses Association, *Nursing Education in Canada Statistics 2007-2008*, Ottawa, December 2009, 6.

² Ontario Ministry of Finance, "Ontario Population Projections 2008 – 2036" (Toronto, Fall 2009).

aboriginal or francophone, students with disabilities, and students who come from low-income backgrounds.

- **Pathways:** Many of Ontario's future RNs are already working in the health-care system, often as Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs). Others are working full time in other fields. There will be a need to create new and expand existing pathways to make it possible for these learners to meet the requirements to become Registered Nurses within CASN accreditation standards.

Over the long term, Ontario must ensure that there is an adequate supply of well-educated nurses to meet the human resource needs of the health-care sector. Current projections show:

- While the number of new graduates in nursing has returned to the levels of the 1980s, it is still too low to meet the projected long-term demand.
- The most comprehensive study of nursing supply and demand in Canada has projected that nationwide the shortage of nurses will grow from 11,000 in 2007 to almost 60,000 by 2022.³
- 24,000 registered nurses working in Ontario are over age 55 – about 26 per cent of the total.⁴ Almost all will retire over the next decade.
- Competition for nurses from employers in the United States will be strong. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that the number of jobs for RNs in the United States will grow by 582,000 (22 per cent) between 2008 and 2018, due to the growth and aging of the population.⁵

The opportunity

The time is right for the Ontario government to work with colleges to expand the colleges' role in offering baccalaureate degrees in nursing. Colleges are capable of reaching out to prospective students from diverse backgrounds who have the aptitude to be successful in nursing degree programs.

As part of the long-term evolution of Ontario's postsecondary education system, students' choices for earning a nursing baccalaureate should include university programs, college programs, and collaborative college-university programs.

Many colleges aspire to offer their own four-year baccalaureate degree programs in nursing. A regulatory change is needed to authorize colleges to grant the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Any college wishing to grant this degree would be required to meet CASN's national accreditation standards and the requirements of PEQAB.

Other colleges have advised their university partners that they would like to continue their current programs, which are offered in collaboration with the university and lead to a university degree.

³ Gail Tomblin Murphy, Stephen Birch, Rob Alder, Adrian Mackenzie, Lynn Lethbridge, Lisa Little and Amanda Cook, *Tested Solutions for Eliminating Canada's Registered Nursing Shortage* (Ottawa: Canadian Nurses Association, July 2009).

⁴ Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, *Backgrounder on Ontario RNs 2008* (Toronto, 2009), 3.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, "Employment by industry, occupation, and percent distribution, 2008 and projected 2018: Registered Nurses," National Employment Matrix, Table 29-1111 (Washington, DC, 2009).

With the government's support, Ontario's colleges could provide more choices and more opportunities for students in high-quality nursing baccalaureate programs over the coming decade.

These programs would:

- Create the potential for more options for students pursuing nursing careers.
- Meet national standards for quality so that graduates will be eligible for entry to practice and for admission to master's level programs.
- Attract students from groups that have traditionally been more likely to enrol at a college than a university, including students who are aboriginal or francophone, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds.
- Create and expand pathways for RPNs who are already working in health care and would like to advance their education to become RNs.
- Draw on colleges' strength in providing student-focused education.
- Offer opportunities for nursing and practical nursing students (who are educated entirely in the college system) to learn about each other's roles and improve interprofessional collaboration.

Why colleges?

Ontario's college system has the experience, capacity and willingness to help meet the growing need for baccalaureate degrees in nursing.

Colleges are offering high-quality baccalaureate nursing education today

In 2000, the former government amended the nursing registration regulation to require that new entrants to the nursing profession hold a baccalaureate degree in nursing from a university. Until that time, colleges had been educating 70 per cent of Ontario's new nurses. They were required to terminate their existing diploma programs and seek collaborations with universities so that they could contribute their resources towards achieving the change.

Today, 22 of Ontario's 24 colleges offer nursing programs in collaboration with a university. In some cases, colleges offer 90 per cent or more of the actual instruction.

Every collaborative program is accredited through CASN. College partners are accredited as an "educational site" within the overall collaboration. The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) has designated CASN accreditation as a requirement for the purpose of program approval. Since 2005, all students entering the profession must be graduates from a program that has achieved CASN accreditation. Colleges support continuation of this CNO policy.

All graduating students must pass the Canadian Registered Nurse Exam (CRNE) on completion of their nursing program to be eligible for registration in their jurisdiction. Registration is compulsory to practice.

The academic qualifications of college nursing faculty have been substantially strengthened. With rare exceptions, all full-time nursing faculty at colleges hold a graduate degree. In most

programs, several faculty hold or are pursuing a doctorate. An increasing number of faculty hold a graduate degree in nursing, while others may hold a graduate degree in other disciplines and have many years of practical experience in the profession and in teaching nursing.

All college nursing programs are engaged in scholarly activity, and several colleges have active research programs funded in part by external grants. Many nursing programs have adopted a model of scholarship that integrates research, synthesis, practice, and teaching, as endorsed by CASN.⁶ The scholarly community in these colleges can provide an appropriate academic context for nursing degree studies.

Colleges' success in offering baccalaureate nursing education builds on their historic strength in creating applied learning environments. Colleges have long-standing experience in clinical education and relationships with clinical providers. They have a demonstrated capability to adjust rapidly to the changing needs of the health-care system.

The changes colleges have made over the past decade mean that some colleges already have the strength to offer high-quality nursing baccalaureate education today. Colleges that wish to offer their own baccalaureate programs are committed to continuing to meet the CASN accreditation requirements.

Colleges can make nursing degrees more accessible

Ontario colleges are already proving that they can offer programs in communities where there is a need for nursing baccalaureate education.

The growth in demand for nurses has been strong in major urban centres and is expected to remain so over the longer term, fuelled in part by high levels of immigration:

- Colleges offer more than half of the total nursing instruction in the Greater Toronto Area.
- In Kitchener-Waterloo-Guelph, where the three local universities do not have nursing programs, the college supplies almost all of the full-time nursing faculty; the balance is supplied by McMaster University in Hamilton.

Yet the need is not confined to urban centres:

- Students who live more than 80 km from a university are significantly less likely to attend.⁷ Students from middle-class and lower-income families are especially likely to be left out. Students who leave their communities to attend university often do not return after graduation. Colleges have the experience and commitment to serve nursing students in smaller communities where they will ultimately want to practice.
- In centres such as Barrie, Sarnia and Belleville, students can start their nursing degree at a college, but must then travel to another city to complete the university portion of the degree. No university offers a nursing program locally.

Colleges – which have been leaders in providing local access to educational opportunities – will strive to expand opportunities for nursing education. For example, Confederation College, in collaboration with Lakehead University and with support from the Ontario government, has offered a nursing baccalaureate program to students in Dryden, Fort Frances, Kenora and Sioux Lookout, based at Confederation's Kenora campus.

⁶ This model is based on Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Stanford CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

⁷ Marc Frenette, "Access to college and university: Does distance matter?" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

Colleges provide access for under-represented students

Colleges have a strong record in serving students who are not well-served by other institutions. Studies in the United States and Canada have consistently shown that colleges succeed in reaching out to students who are reluctant or unable to attend a traditional university:

- Colleges are more likely than universities to serve low- and middle-income students. Statistics Canada has found that university attendance is heavily skewed to the upper half of the family income scale. Colleges draw about equally from all four quartiles of family income, including from middle- and lower-income families who have been most affected by the economic downturn.⁸
- Colleges are more likely to serve aboriginal students. Aboriginal people make up two per cent of Ontario's population age 15 to 44, but they account for four per cent of college students and 10 per cent of students at colleges in northern Ontario. Also, 23 per cent of Ontario's aboriginal population have successfully completed a program at a college, compared with nine per cent who have completed a university degree.⁹
- Colleges are more likely to serve students with disabilities. Nine per cent of first-year students in Canadian colleges and five per cent of those in Canadian universities report having a disability.¹⁰
- Colleges have been leaders in creating programs for internationally educated professionals, making it possible for recent immigrants to put their education to full use in the workforce.

The primary explanation for these successes is that colleges have a long history of strong faculty engagement with students. A growing body of literature suggests that interaction with faculty and other students is a key determinant of whether at-risk students succeed in higher education.¹¹

Colleges create new pathways for students who are already in the workforce

Colleges are committed to serving students who are already in the workplace. The colleges' success depends on providing programs that meet the needs of these students. More than 60 per cent of college applicants are no longer in secondary school. By contrast, more than 75 per cent of new university undergraduate students arrive directly from secondary school.

As part of their mandate to provide pathways for working students, colleges have been leaders in creating opportunities for RPNs to access education leading to a nursing degree. RPNs have already completed two years of nursing education and are committed to working in a health-care setting.

⁸ Miles Corak, Garth Lipps, and John Zhao, "Family income and participation in post-secondary education" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

⁹ Colleges Ontario, *Environmental Scan* (Toronto, 2009), 33; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Second Annual Review and Research Plan* (Toronto: The Council, February 2009), 39, 42. See also Colleges Ontario, *Environmental Scan* (Toronto, 2008), 37, and Hon. Bob Rae, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning* (Toronto, 2005), 64.

¹⁰ Colleges Ontario, *Environmental Scan* (Toronto, 2008), 37. See also *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*, 69.

¹¹ See for example Kay M. McClenney, "Research Update: The Community College Survey of Student Engagement", *Community College Review* 35:2, (2007), 137-146.

Typically, RPNs do not have the secondary school science credits that would be needed for admission to a baccalaureate nursing program. Alternatively, persons initially choosing the RPN diploma may have done so for financial or social reasons, even though they would have been eligible for admission to a degree program.

Several colleges have created specialized programs for RPNs who wish to pursue a baccalaureate degree. These programs are offered in a variety of flexible arrangements to meet the needs of working RPNs. For example, Centennial College's RPN to BScN Nursing Bridging Program has attracted large numbers of GTA students and was expanded in 2009 to locations in Woodstock and Chatham. There are future plans to deliver the program to northern, eastern, western and central Ontario. The program prepares students for admission to a nursing degree completion program, which is offered by Ryerson University on-site in hybrid format, meaning it uses a combination of distance education, traditional delivery and alternative delivery modes.

Seven colleges surveyed for this proposal reported that they would like to develop new programs to support RPNs who wish to pursue a baccalaureate degree. In some cases, the university partner is reluctant to do so because of the university's primary focus on traditional students. Colleges reported that they would also like to offer more flexible opportunities for nursing students, including:

- Compressed programs that use the summer semester to shorten the overall program length.
- Winter cohort admissions so that more than one cohort graduates during the calendar year. This creates more pathways for students and relieves the pressure on practice settings to absorb novices during the summer months when mentorship by senior nurses may be less available.
- Hybrid programs that use a combination of distance education, traditional delivery and alternative delivery modes.

Joining with other jurisdictions

To meet the need for qualified nurses, other jurisdictions have authorized colleges to grant baccalaureate nursing degrees.

British Columbia

British Columbia authorizes nursing degrees at universities and select colleges in order to supply an adequate number of nurses in all parts of the province.

Three colleges – Vancouver Community College, Langara College in Vancouver, and Douglas College in New Westminster – all offer the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Their graduates have been accepted for admission to graduate programs in nursing at several British Columbia universities. Other colleges in British Columbia offer nursing baccalaureates in collaboration with a university.

Manitoba

Manitoba authorizes nursing degrees at two universities and one college.

Red River College in Winnipeg received approval from the Manitoba government to begin a new Bachelor of Nursing degree program in September 2010. To meet the need for new nurses, the college offers a compressed program: students earn a four-year nursing baccalaureate in three academic years of 10 months each. Demand has been strong, and the college now has a 30-month waiting list for the program.

Florida

Florida is a leader in recognizing colleges' potential to contribute to meeting the economy's need for degree-level graduates. Seven of Florida's colleges have been approved to offer the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.¹² Other Florida colleges have chosen to continue their long-standing arrangements to offer nursing degrees in collaboration with a university.

Other jurisdictions

Ontario is unusual among large jurisdictions in that it restricts entry to the nursing profession to students who hold degrees from a research university. Most U.S. states take a mixed approach: baccalaureate degrees in nursing are offered by research universities and also by four-year degree-granting institutions that have a limited research mission.¹³

Alberta has adopted this same approach. Students may seek a baccalaureate nursing degree from a research university or from Grant McEwan University or Mount Royal University. Grant McEwan and Mount Royal are four-year institutions that offer a range of diplomas and baccalaureate degrees.

Effect of the Ontario Labour Mobility Act

The Ontario Labour Mobility Act, 2009, creates a significant anomaly for Ontario's nursing baccalaureate programs.

The new statute gives effect to recent amendments to Chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade.¹⁴ The amendments provide that workers in regulated occupations can apply to be certified in the same occupation in another province or territory without having to undergo significant additional training, examination or assessment. Individuals are still required to apply to jurisdictional regulators for certification in their occupation.

This means that a nurse who holds a baccalaureate degree from a college in British Columbia or Manitoba and who registers in that province is also eligible to register as a nurse in Ontario – even though no college in Ontario would be permitted to grant the nursing baccalaureate degree.

¹² http://www.fldoe.org/cc/students/bach_degree.asp

¹³ California offers almost all baccalaureate nursing education through the four-year California State University system. The research universities (University of California system) are not permitted to offer this credential.

¹⁴ "First Ministers' Declaration Regarding the Agreement on Internal Trade," Ottawa, January 16, 2009. http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/EN_Internal%20Trade%20Agreement.pdf

In an extreme case, an Ontario student could enrol at a college in British Columbia or Manitoba, earn a nursing baccalaureate, register in British Columbia or Manitoba, and then seek registration as a nurse in Ontario.

This anomaly highlights Ontario's unusual approach to providing baccalaureate nursing education: colleges provide more than half of the instruction, but no college can grant a baccalaureate nursing degree.

Why should Ontario's current policies change?

Ontario has the opportunity to create new nursing baccalaureate programs at colleges that match or exceed the calibre of those being offered elsewhere. To make this vision a reality, the Ontario government needs to revise some current policies.

Prior to 2005, colleges graduated approximately 70 per cent of the new RNs in Ontario – fulfilling a mission they had served since the early 1970s. Nursing graduates from three-year college diploma programs wrote the same registration exams as nursing graduates from four-year university baccalaureate programs, and graduates from both types of programs were admitted to the profession on an equal basis.

In 2000, in response to a long-standing recommendation from leaders in the nursing profession and the report of the Nursing Task Force,¹⁵ the government agreed to make a baccalaureate degree in nursing a requirement for entry to the nursing profession, effective in 2005. The current regulation specifies that new nurses must hold a "baccalaureate degree in nursing granted by a university."¹⁶ At the time the regulation was debated and accepted, colleges could not grant degrees of any kind and there was no policy framework or structure to regulate the quality of degrees.

Over the past decade, colleges have become an accepted part of Ontario's strategy for making high-quality degrees accessible to more students. Colleges today offer more than 50 four-year baccalaureate programs in career-oriented fields of study. Colleges have demonstrated their ability to offer breadth courses in social sciences and humanities as well as professional courses. Yet they are still excluded by regulation from offering degrees in nursing.

¹⁵ *Good Nursing, Good Health: An Investment for the 21st Century: Report of the Nursing Task Force*, January 1999.

¹⁶ Ontario Regulation 275/94 under the *Nursing Act, 1991*. The nursing profession and nursing educators had lengthy discussions in the 1990s on whether a baccalaureate degree should be the entry-to-practice requirement. A joint report prepared by college and university nursing educators in 1994 adopted in principle the view that a degree should be the entry-to-practice requirement for RNs. The report took it for granted that "degree" meant a university degree and that colleges wishing to participate in degree-level education would need to collaborate with a university. The requirement for a "university" degree appeared in the College of Nurses of Ontario's proposed regulation, and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities announced the government's acceptance of the new requirement on April 12, 2000. Separately, in April 2000, the government announced that it would introduce legislation permitting colleges to offer degrees in applied fields of study, and this legislation was enacted in December 2000 – eight months after Regulation 275/94 was passed. For details of this history, see Cassandra Thompson, "What Form of Collaboration Is Best for Nursing? Qualitative Case Studies Comparing College-University Partnerships" (Ph.D. thesis, OISE/UT, 2007), 47-55, and Dale Kirby, "Change and Challenge: Ontario's Collaborative Baccalaureate Nursing Programs," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 37:2 (2007), 29-46. The report of college and university nursing educators is: *Education of the Nurse of the Future: Position Statement by the Provincial Steering Committee on the Future of Nursing Education: A Collaborative Initiative of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) Nursing Programs, the Council of Ontario University Programs in Nursing (COUPN) and Clinical Partners* (published February 1994; modified May 1995).

Colleges and universities have gone to great lengths to support the change process from diploma to degree education for Ontario's nursing workforce. They have formed and maintained collaborations to meet the current nursing regulatory requirement. In some cases, these collaborations work well and offer students a better program than either the college or the university might offer by itself.

In other cases, the public benefits of collaboration are limited. The college would be fully able to offer a high-quality program by itself. The requirement to collaborate imposes unnecessary restrictions and costs.

Restrictions on access

Several colleges report that they would like to expand their nursing enrolment but are unable to do so because their university partner does not wish to expand or lacks the capacity to do so. This situation is the inevitable outcome of the requirement that nursing be delivered through collaborative programs. Where the two partners do not have the same capacity, the partner with the smaller capacity determines the capacity of the overall program.

Collaboration costs

Collaborations impose significant transaction costs on the partner institutions.

Frequent meetings of department chairs, administrative personnel and sometimes senior executives are needed to ensure uniform standards across the program. These standards go well beyond academic quality standards. They extend to matters such as:

- A common marketing and recruitment strategy (including special publications and websites that reflect the joint nature of the program).
- Uniformity in course curricula and course materials.
- A common process for applications and admissions.
- Common academic integrity, discipline and appeal measures.
- Resolution of issues arising from different agreements with unions or faculty associations.
- Common standards for access to student services, libraries and information technology.
- Common standards for access to ancillary services such as residence, parking and athletics.
- Agreement on the administration of student records, transcripts, reporting for funding purposes, and other matters where the partners may use different I.T. systems.
- Cost-sharing and revenue-sharing.

Eight collaborations involve a college and a university in different cities (more than 40 km apart). Travel costs and associated staff time may be especially high in these cases.

The costs of collaboration vary depending on the nature of the partnership:

- Models in which each of the collaborating institutions plays a large role in instruction tend to have large costs of collaboration. One large collaboration uses a 2+2 model, that is, a curriculum model consisting of two years at one institution and two years at another. This collaboration has estimated the incremental costs of collaboration at approximately \$700 per full-time employee (FTE) per year. This figure includes only direct and necessary costs of collaboration that exceed the normal cost of operations. It does not include the staff time devoted to meetings and travel. All of these costs impose a burden on both the college and the university.
- Models in which the college performs most or all of the instruction also have extra costs. The university partner may charge for the service of providing overall supervision and for any risk that the university may incur by virtue of being part of the collaboration. In a large collaboration, this service charge may equal approximately \$1,000 per FTE.¹⁷

These costs may be justifiable in cases where the collaboration is offering students a better program than either the college or the university might offer by itself. But they are unnecessary in cases where a college could offer a high-quality program without a university partner. The potential savings could be better applied to program quality and expanded enrolments.

Costs to students

In three collaborations, the students must take classes on campuses in two different cities (more than 40 km apart) in order to graduate. Typically, the student must relocate for several semesters or arrange for a very long commute.

Long-distance arrangements impose direct costs to students compared to the cost of attending a single-location program. They also impose a major barrier to students who have work or family responsibilities that prevent them from relocating.

What the Ontario government can do

As part of the long-term evolution of Ontario's postsecondary education system, the government should amend the current nursing registration regulation so that new entrants to the nursing profession can hold a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree granted by a college or by a university.

This means that students in the future will have the option of pursuing a nursing degree at a university, a college, or a collaborative college-university program. College degrees in nursing can be an important new option for students and for the system.

¹⁷ Financial data supplied in confidence by colleges.

The Ontario government should support colleges in offering baccalaureate degrees in nursing

The most important step that the Ontario government can take is to make college baccalaureate degree programs a part of its plan for meeting the future need for RNs. This means:

- Colleges should be permitted to offer baccalaureate degrees in nursing, subject to normal regulatory and accreditation requirements.
- Colleges and universities that prefer to maintain their collaborative programs should have the option to do so.

Ontario should recognize a single high standard of quality for baccalaureate degrees

The government should recognize that there is a single high standard of quality for baccalaureate degrees, offered by either universities or colleges. This high standard derives from two sources:

- The Ontario government's policies with respect to baccalaureate education; and,
- The existence of a recognized national accreditation body for all nursing baccalaureate programs, with a single standard of quality, reinforced by uniform national examinations for entry to the profession.

Ontario has adopted two documents – the 2007 Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance in Degree Education in Canada¹⁸ and the Ontario Qualifications Framework¹⁹ – that confirm that a single standard of quality is in place for all baccalaureate programs in Ontario.

The 2007 Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance in Degree Education in Canada sets out a single level of degree standards for all baccalaureate degrees in Canada, regardless of whether the degree is offered by a university or a college.

The principles of the ministerial statement have been incorporated in the Ontario Qualifications Framework. This framework describes the main purpose of each type of postsecondary credential, typical admission requirements, typical duration, and the knowledge and skills expected of graduates for each qualification. The Qualifications Framework describes a single quality standard for the honours baccalaureate degree, while noting that the degree may be “academically-oriented, profession-oriented, [or] in an applied area of study.” Regardless of type, all honours baccalaureate degrees are deemed to prepare students for graduate studies or for employment.²⁰

This single quality standard is reinforced by the national accrediting body, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, which has direct experience in assessing and approving baccalaureate degrees at universities and at colleges in British Columbia and Manitoba. Any Ontario college that wishes to offer its own baccalaureate in nursing will need to meet these same high standards.

To put this single standard into practice, the Ontario government should amend the nursing entry-to-practice regulation to delete the reference to “universities.” Other professions have

¹⁸ <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/qa/indexe.stm>

¹⁹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/postsec/oqf.pdf>

already moved to recognize the quality of college degrees. The Ontario College of Teachers has changed its entry requirements so that new teachers must hold a baccalaureate from “an acceptable postsecondary institution” in addition to a baccalaureate in education. The Society of Management Accountants of Ontario (CMA Ontario) requires prospective CMAs to hold a “university or applied degree” that includes courses in designated subjects.

The naming of baccalaureate nursing degrees at universities and colleges should reflect the single high standard of quality for nursing programs

As the naming of the degree should reflect a single standard of quality, graduates of college baccalaureate nursing programs should be granted a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN or BScN). This term is used by most universities and by the colleges in British Columbia that award the nursing degree. It is recognized internationally as a professional degree with a science component.

A standard credential will communicate to the public, employers and the profession that all graduates meet the same standards. Establishing a single standard will also facilitate pathways for college nursing degree graduates into graduate schools.

Putting this nomenclature into practice will require some dialogue between the government and PEQAB, which advises the minister on degree nomenclature.

PEQAB’s current nomenclature standard does not specifically contemplate the acceptability of the “Bachelor of Science in Nursing” designation.²¹

The government should work with colleges and universities to establish targets for future admissions to nursing baccalaureate programs and should fully fund spaces in these programs

The funding for college baccalaureate nursing programs should be the same as for all other nursing degree programs. At present, operating grants and tuition fees are the same for all baccalaureate nursing programs, including collaborative college-university programs and university stand-alone programs.

By their nature, nursing programs are among the most expensive undergraduate programs that an institution can offer. Students must undertake practicum courses in small-sized groups with small student-to-faculty ratios for reasons of patient safety. Students require supervised placements in hospitals and other health-care and community settings.

A U.S. study has found that the per-student cost of instruction in nursing is similar to that for engineering. It is about 50 per cent higher than for science programs such as physics and chemistry, and more than twice as high as most programs in social sciences, humanities or business.²²

At this level of expense, the government and the postsecondary institutions will benefit from having agreed targets for annual admissions in the coming years, backed by full funding for all of the approved spaces at current levels of grant and tuition. Doing so will ensure that colleges and universities can continue to provide high-quality nursing education.

²⁰ Ontario Qualifications Framework, 1.

²¹ Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, “Nomenclature Standard (Public and Private Applicants),” Sept. 14, 2009.

²² Michael F. Middaugh, Rosalinda Graham and Abdus Shahid, *A Study of Higher Education Instructional Expenditures: The Delaware Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity* (Washington DC: Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics report NCES 2003-161, 2003), 14-15.

What colleges will do

Colleges will help meet Ontario's need for nurses based on two principles:

- Maintaining national quality standards, and
- Improving accessibility and creating pathways for more students.

Maintaining national quality standards

Some colleges will seek to offer their own baccalaureate nursing degrees, while others will prefer to continue their current collaborative programs. Regardless of which path they choose, all colleges will continue to meet CASN's national accreditation standards.

Colleges that wish to offer their own baccalaureate nursing degrees recognize that it will be their responsibility to meet accreditation standards. All college sites that offer a collaborative degree at present meet the CASN standards for the "educational site" of a collaborative program. Colleges will bear the costs of any adaptations that would be necessary to mount a stand-alone degree.

Improving accessibility and create new pathways for students

Colleges want to work with the government and with universities to plan how many nursing baccalaureate degree spaces for students are needed and how they will be accommodated. Colleges have proven that they can be effective partners in planning to meet the needs of health-care employers.

Different colleges will play different roles in meeting this demand. Some colleges will choose to expand, while others will maintain current enrolment. Some colleges will seek to offer their own degrees, while others will prefer to continue their current collaborative programs.

Colleges will create more pathways so that qualified students from a variety of backgrounds have opportunities to complete a nursing baccalaureate degree, while upholding the high standard of quality required for accreditation. This will include a range of options such as creating bridging programs for RPNs who hold two-year diplomas and offering more flexible programs to meet the needs of working adults.

Honour current commitments to students and universities

Colleges will honour their commitments to their university partners and to students in collaborative nursing programs. With the cooperation of the university partner, current students will have an opportunity to complete their programs and receive the university credential that they contracted to obtain when they registered in the collaborative program.

Any termination of current collaborations will be governed by the agreements that the college and university partners have made.

Work with government, universities and health-care providers to address other capacity constraints

Identifying clinical education placements is a significant challenge in maintaining and expanding nursing education programs.

The government has already provided essential support by funding simulation equipment for nursing programs. Further expansion of simulation will be one element in addressing the placement challenge.

Colleges that decide to offer stand-alone degree programs will utilize their strong ties to their local communities to broaden clinical site recruitment in order to meet their students' placement needs. They will also investigate the feasibility of adapting best practices from other jurisdictions and further explore new learning interfaces such as clinical simulation.

Educating more nursing faculty is also a challenge. Many universities have expressed interest in expanding their master and doctoral programs in nursing to meet the need for nursing faculty. All colleges and universities with nursing programs would benefit from such an expansion.

Moving ahead

The long-term need for more RNs has been identified. The system's capacity to address the need is stretched. Now is the time to develop plans for meeting this need.

A decision to make colleges part of the government's plan for sustaining and renewing the nursing workforce will require minimal expense in the short term. Opening doors to college nursing degrees will benefit Ontario's health-care system as more high-quality degree programs are developed and more nurses with a greater diversity of backgrounds and career interests graduate.



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ONTARIO | ONTARIO

655 Bay Street, Suite 1010, Toronto, ON, M5G 2K4

T: 416.596.0744 F: 416.596.2364

www.collegesontario.org