## Happier Nurses Means Better Care

Canadians love nurses. Time and time again, pollsters have found that nursing ranks among the most trusted professions. In fact, for many Canadians, nurses act as the barometer of how well the healthcare system is working. I remember conducting a focus group among members of the public on their attitudes toward the healthcare system. They were talking about how they got information about issues in the system, when one young mother of two summed it up perfectly, "Forget about what politicians or the newspapers say. If I walk into an emergency room and see that the nurses are running off their feet ... they're too stressed out for a smile, I know there's a problem."

So what's our barometer forecasting? The results of a national survey of 200 nurses conducted last fall\* paint a telling picture. When asked to suggest the most important healthcare issues facing Canada, nurses overwhelmingly point to a lack of healthcare staff and work overload (30%), while another two-inten (20%) point to the underlying issue of government cutbacks and funding shortages. No other healthcare issue was mentioned by more than 5% of nurses.

In fact, when asked directly, three-quarters (75%) of nurses polled believe there are human resource shortages in nursing. The impact of the shortages has a real effect on the quality of life for nurses, and subsequently the quality of care they are able to provide. Nurses themselves explain that shortages in their profession mean an increased workload (mentioned by 40% of nurses), lower quality care for Canadians (30%) and high stress for nurses (10%).

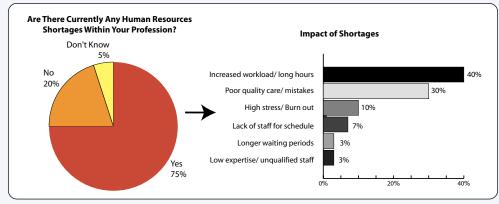
What does the future hold for our nursing profession? Currently, a lot of attention is being paid by government and hospitals to finding solutions to help attract and retain the healthcare system's front-line caregivers.

Nurses themselves point to a host of solutions that would help them in their work. They are asking for more staff (54%), more funding (20%) and more consistent training (20%). They'd like to see better access to the proper equipment and supplies to help deliver care (14%). They'd like higher wages (12%), a more manageable workload (7%) and to work in an environment with good morale (7%). They'd like recognition and respect from the public (5%), and they'd like to have more time to spend with patients (2%). In short, they'd like to have the resources to allow them to care for Canadians in the way that they know Canadians deserve.

As for making nursing a more appealing career choice, nurses suggest that much can be done to demonstrate that nursing is a respected and valuable profession. They suggest higher salaries (9%), value and respect from the public (9%), better working conditions (8%), guaranteed full-time work (8%), putting caring back into nursing (5%), more hands-on training (4%), reorganizing shift work (4%) and improving the image of nursing (4%).

Currently, federal and provincial governments are searching for ways to sustain the healthcare system, using emissaries such as Roy Romanow, to talk to Canadians about the future of healthcare. Let's not forget that it's when a nurse gives a reassuring smile, or takes the time to explain what's happening to a sick relative, that Canadians feel they can rely on the system to care

> for their family. Canadians want to see their nurses smiling.



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Given nurses' perception that their profession is in need of more warm bodies to deliver the care that Canadians need, it is somewhat disconcerting to note that fewer than half of today's nurses would advise a friend or family member to choose a career in nursing (47%).

From the 2001 Annual Health Care in Canada survey, sponsored by Merck Frosst Canada Inc., the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations, Canadian Healthcare Association, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian Homecare Association, Canadian Association for Community Care and the Frosst Health Care Foundation.