

Christie Gardens Apartments and Care Inc. and the Ontario Long Term Care Association: Long Term Care Recruitment and Retention Project

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In 2008, the Ontario Long Term Care Association was awarded funding from HealthForceOntario to assist with its nursing recruitment strategy based on research it had initiated in 2007. The research goal was to understand the career motivations and perceptions of students enrolled in registered nursing (RN) and registered practical nursing (RPN) programs in Ontario to develop and test a message to support recruitment.

Focus groups and surveys were conducted among RN and RPN students at Ontario universities and colleges and among nursing staff employed in nine long-term care (LTC) homes. The goal was to understand the converging and diverging perceptions and attitudes among nurses and nursing students. This would inform a communication plan piloted among nursing students, directing them to an interactive website to connect with LTC nursing staff and information about preparation for and application to a career in the sector.

Research with the students revealed many misconceptions about the LTC work environment. To discern misconceptions from “truths,” we collected attitudes and perceptions of nursing staff already working in LTC homes. These misconceptions and “truths” were examined to identify common elements among nursing students and LTC home staff. From these, a single primary message was created: “There’s more to LTC than you think.” The message was kept general to allow nurses to decide what “more” meant, depending on their career journey and aspirations.

This research was able to inform a primary message for a recruitment campaign piloted among nursing students. Between October 6, 2008 and July 27, 2009, the pilot website recorded over 2,500 unique visitors. OLTCA demonstrated it was possible to research and create a single message to bolster enthusiasm about nursing in LTC among nursing students in Ontario.

Lessons Learned

- Researching convergent perceptions and attitudes between nursing staff and students provides evidence for successful recruitment messaging.
- The level of satisfaction among nurses working in LTC can dispel nursing student myths about the sector.
- RNs and RPNs working in LTC homes are the best ambassadors for recruitment.

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