RESEARCH TO ACTION
Evaluation Project

Introduction

Nurse retention and recruitment strategies are essential to the continued viability of the nursing workforce and healthcare delivery in Canada (Tomblin Murphy et al. 2009). The health system risks an exodus of knowledgeable, experienced nurses at a critical time. In 2009, the most recent year for which data are available, the average age of the Canadian registered nurse reached its highest measured level, 45.2 years, an increase of 0.5 years since 2005 (CIHI 2010). The presence of older, experienced nurses in the workforce can facilitate the integration of younger, inexperienced nurses. If greater numbers of senior nurses retire, health organizations will lose a tremendous source of knowledge and expertise.

A Health Canada–funded study undertaken by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions found that many new graduates feel unprepared for the work environment and overwhelmed by the demands on them as they begin their career (Wortsman and Janowitz 2006). Better orientation and mentoring by experienced nurses were identified as key to assisting new graduates in their transition and integration into the workplace. The majority of senior nurses reported that flexible scheduling arrangements would greatly influence their decision to delay retirement and continue working. These findings echo the polling results of nurse union members, who have consistently identified retention and recruitment initiatives as a bargaining priority over the past several years.

While the nursing shortage is widely recognized, there is still little evidence regarding the effective implementation of retention and recruitment strategies. Given the magnitude of the challenge, and the resources required for retention and recruitment strategies, it is imperative that we be able to measure their effectiveness and identify best practices.

The Alberta *Research to Action* project involved an evaluation of seven retention and recruitment initiatives contained in the 2001 and 2007 collective agreements between Alberta Health Services and the United Nurses of Alberta. These province-wide initiatives include an entry-level program (Transitional Graduate Nurse Recruitment Program), flexible work arrangements (Weekend Worker, Flexible Part-Time, Seasonal Part-Time and Benefit-Eligible Casual Employee) and pre-retirement programs (Retirement Preparation and

Pre-Retirement FTE Reduction). At the time of the project, over 1,600 nurses had participated in the seven initiatives.

References

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Wortsman, A. and S. Janowitz. 2006. *Taking Steps Forward: Retaining and Valuing Experienced Nurses.* Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.