

## Nurse Leaders: Seize the Opportunity to Shape the Future of Healthcare



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**It is an honour** to serve as the President of ACEN for the current year and I am inspired by the potential of nurse leaders to actively shape the future of the Canadian healthcare system. There are many challenges ahead, and nurses can and should play an important role in addressing the healthcare needs of Canadians. As nurse leaders, we need to seize the opportunity to promote these roles.

One of the most valuable aspects of joining ACEN has been the ability to meet and network with nurse leaders from across the country. At our annual general meeting, ACEN debated the issue of expanding our traditional membership to include emerging nurse leaders. We have been a strong network for senior nurse leaders, and while that commitment remains, ACEN has embraced the opportunity to expand that network to include emerging leaders. This change will not only increase the size of the network, it will also provide the opportunity to support and mentor the nursing leaders of the future. It is my hope that during the coming year, we will expand our membership and strengthen our new network of established and emerging nurse leaders.

As President, I thought I would share a bit about my nursing career. My journey to chief nursing officer would not be described as traditional. I would not have imagined when I became a registered nurse in 1982 that I would one day be the Vice-President and Chief Nursing Officer of the largest regional health authority in Manitoba. In the early days of my career, I worked in direct nursing care in acute care and community care. I then moved on to a position that allowed me to

have a role in both of those settings of practice, as the Hospital Home Care liaison, responsible for supporting the transitions from hospital to home care and long-term care. This role taught me to have a “systems lens” and demonstrated what is possible when we approach healthcare delivery from a system perspective rather than the sum of its independent parts. I also learned to understand the value and the impact of the various roles that nurses play across the continuum of care.

Subsequently, I moved on to progressive leadership positions in home care and long term care. These roles included responsibilities at the local site level and eventually responsibilities for regional planning and operations.

As chief nursing officer, every day I see the impact and potential of nursing practice across the continuum of care. Nurses have many different roles and responsibilities, and bring a diverse knowledge base, skills and abilities to their work every day. As an employer and as a leader it is essential to ensure that all nurses are working to their full scope of practice in their current roles. Too often, arbitrary limitations on nursing scope of practice leave healthcare decision-makers with misconceptions about the roles that nurses can and should play in the system. Nurses need to highlight their positive contributions and seek new and innovative roles to meet the needs of people in the future.

We have seen the expansion of advanced practice roles such as nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists. These nurses with additional and specialized education have demonstrated the value that nursing knowledge and skills can have on the health and well-being of specific populations. We need to build on this strong evolution and expand the practice of all registered nurses in Canada. Our health system will be challenged by a rapidly aging population who are living with chronic disease. There are many examples of nurses working independently or as part of interprofessional teams that have successfully supported individuals to learn to manage those chronic diseases.

Whether it is the nurse planning care and educating individuals and families at hospital discharge, the nurse in the Diabetes Education Centre who is teaching the individual how to manage their diabetes and their lifestyle, the primary care nurse who is helping the individual understand their multiple medications or the home care nurse who is supporting the individual and their family at the end stage of their illness, all make an important contribution to the health of Canadians. More and more healthcare will be delivered in community settings and nurses need to assume fundamental roles in helping people to manage their health and maintain their maximum independence. Nurses working in institutions need to be focused on ensuring people have the knowledge they need and the ability to return safely to their homes. The knowledge and skill set of nurses is ideally suited to this work.

As nurses, we need to promote the contributions that we make and can make in the future.

As nurse leaders and members of ACEN, we need to ensure that we are at the tables where the discussions about the future of our health systems are taking place. We need to champion the contribution that nurses have to make in improving the overall health and well-being of Canadians. There will be many challenges ahead but with challenge comes great opportunity and we need to be poised to seize those opportunities to make a difference.

During this upcoming year, I hope that I will have an opportunity to meet and dialogue with nurse leaders and others from across the country. I also hope that the expanded ACEN membership will engage emerging nurse leaders who are the future of our profession. I look forward to meeting you all.