

Commentary: When You Know Better, Do Better

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Abstract

As the world prepares to celebrate the remarkable life and contributions of Florence Nightingale on her 200th birthday in 2020, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is putting the pieces in place to host an entire new pillar of programs and services focused on leadership for all regulated nurses across Canada. First among these is our relationship with the Dorothy Wylie Health Leaders Institute (DWHLI), which has built a partnership with CNA since 2015. As a great gift to CNA and nursing across Canada, to mark the Nightingale bicentennial we are thrilled that the DWHLI will come fully under CNA in 2020 as our premier residential leadership development program.

Dorothy Wylie epitomized the whole idea of a visionary, risk-taking and forward-leaning leader. The master's program in nursing administration at the University of Toronto that she designed so beautifully in the late 1980s evolved over the years, and ultimately underwent a complete overhaul in 2012–2014 – giving birth then to the university's new Master of Nursing program in health systems leadership and administration. The remarkably successful and impactful institute in her name also has evolved, but its transition from a stand-alone program to one that will sit with CNA is by far the most dramatic and risky move since it was established.

Making the transition has taken time and negotiation. The personal, intellectual and spiritual investments of Judith Skelton-Green, Julia Scott, Bev Simpson and Sue Munro are understandably deep and longstanding. And beyond being high-profile leaders in Canadian nursing, they have become personal friends over the years. So, while we want to honour Dorothy's entrepreneurial, "keep moving"

spirit, on the CNA side we have wanted to proceed carefully and with respect for the love, dedication and generation of work of the real human beings that brought the Institute to this place. At the same time, as a business, we have had to ask tough questions about how everyone involved would feel if elements of the program change going forward. Reality is that different people in the years ahead will have different relationships with the Institute than the founders and they will do things differently. That can be tough.

On the side of the founders, they too have had many conversations about the change and have run into barriers that at times have caused their confidence to be rattled. They came into a relationship with CNA just as the organization was undergoing the most significant down-sizing in its history. The organization is about half the size it was a decade ago, which in plain speak means half the staff with 40% less budget all galloping to deliver services to meet every-growing demands. The founders also ran into a change in CEO followed by some significant changes in the CNA team that again stalled things. So, some of the planned timing of the partnership has been delayed much longer than we would have hoped. The DWHLI team has been patient in taking deep breaths, going back to step one a time or two, and supporting the successful transition of the Institute to CNA in ways they can trust will mean that its impact will not just continue but grow.

Success Built on Great Leadership

The success of the DWHLI is itself a reflection of so many key ingredients in great leadership – collaboration and partnership, courage, imagination and vision. And the evolution of the Institute is exemplary of great policy development that serves to show the potentially huge societal return on relatively small government investments. A pressing need was identified, information was developed, and a feasible solution proposed by credible nurse leaders. Partners and influencers were engaged from the get-go: the efforts then of our visionary chief nursing officer in Ontario, Dr. Kathleen MacMillan aligned well with those of the minister, and the lesson of timing again played out. Partnerships and sponsorships have been a hallmark of the Institute and anchor its sustainability, and we all have been the recipients of a generation of payoff. These are all helpful lessons as we think about the future of the Institute within CNA.

Beyond personal leadership development, among the most common requests coming to CNA are the need for practical skills in areas such as team leadership and communication, management and administration, advocacy and public policy. The DWHLI will anchor our leadership programs going forward and we will consider what different mixes of skills development could best be met within a residential program that will sit alongside other delivery methods across our

programs. We will continue to assess what links to the LEADS competencies make sense for all our leadership work, and as well, what relationships we can build with universities, other professional leadership programs and the College of Health Leaders. As we strive to bolster the national presence of the DWHLI, we will consider ways to move it to different parts of the country in ways that are sustainable for our business model which of course is not for profit but also not for loss!

As we bring the DWHLI into the CNA family in 2020, it will sit with Canada's first national nursing leadership association – a focal point for nursing managers, team leaders, and executives and a point of affiliation, professional development, knowledge sharing and basic support. And as a special tribute to Nightingale's 200th birthday, we will appoint the founding Fellows of the new Canadian Academy of Nursing, honouring the most accomplished nurses in the country in all regulated categories and across the domains of practice. So, we are steering our own "leader ship" toward major program launches in 2020 and doing our homework to make sure they will meet the needs of members and be grounded in sustainable business models.

The late Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." For nearly 20 years the founders of the Dorothy Wylie Health Leaders Institute have helped Canadian nurses to do better and be better. The Canadian Nurses Association is deeply honoured by the gift of adopting this amazing program into our family and we are committed to carrying forward the mission and spirit of Dorothy Wylie and the founders of the Institute carrying her name.

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