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Ageing trend in nursing has serious implications for nurses' career longevity and the availability of nurse educators, study reports

(Toronto, June 30, 2009) – Career longevity, student mobility, program availability and an aging pool of students are some of the challenges presented by trends in nursing education programs with implications for planning and managing nursing human resources concludes a recent study by the Nursing Health Services Research Unit at the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto. These challenges were identified in a *Review of Nursing Education Data in Ontario 1990-2004*. Study results suggest that strategies directed at the production of new nurses can be an effective component of a multi faceted approach to enhancing the sustainability of the nursing workforce to meet the increasingly complex health needs of Ontarians.

Findings indicate that 30-40% of students in entry-to-practice programs for Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses are aged over 30 years shortening their potential participation in the workforce. Geographically, nursing degree programs have the highest output of nurses in the Greater Toronto Area, while more nurses graduate through diploma programs in Central and Western Ontario and practical nursing programs in Central and Eastern Ontario, raising questions about program availability and demand. The study found that applicants to practical nursing programs submitted the fewest applications suggesting that they may be less likely to move to obtain education. Workforce projections suggest that Ontario will need to produce significantly more Registered Practical Nurses than Registered Nurses to offset workforce losses; increasing locally delivered programs may be one way to recruit and supply additional Registered Practical Nurses across the province.

The study highlighted the impact of the aging trend on the enrolment of nurses to masters and doctoral programs directly affecting the available pool of nursing faculty members and their length of time in the workforce prior to retirement. To address this trend, researchers advise nurse educators to identify and mentor young baccalaureate students in a bid to encourage interest in completing a masters or PhD earlier in their career which in turn will increase the number of graduates with longer academic and scientific career potential.

If Ontario is to become the employer of choice and provide the increasingly complex care required to meet the health care needs of Ontarians, policy makers and educators must address not only the production of new nurses, but also other social, political, geographical, and economic factors known to influence health human resource planning and the mix of healthcare providers required. Only then can the healthcare workforce be effectively and efficiently planned and managed.

To download a copy of the full report visit (www.nhsru.com). For further information on this study, contact:

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