

Nursing Health Services Research Unit

a collaborative project of
the University of Toronto
Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty
of Nursing and McMaster
University
School of Nursing

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conduct and disseminate
research that focuses on:

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Nursing Health Services Research Unit McMaster University - University of Toronto

Fact Sheet: Community Health Nursing in Ontario: Enablers and Barriers for Effective Practice

This fact sheet is based on *Better Data Better Performance: Community Health Nursing in Ontario*,¹ a study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The full report is available online at www.nhsru.com.

Background

Recent policy reports and risks of Avian flu, SARS and West Nile virus have emphasized the need to strengthen community and public health practice. Workforce planners need to better understand the enablers and barriers for community health nurses (CHNs) to practice effectively. A questionnaire informed by focus groups of CHNs and senior managers was distributed to CHNs and managers across Ontario. Responses were analyzed according to the themes identified in the focus groups. Highlights included:

Personal and Professional Confidence

- More than 80% CHNs reported they had sufficient confidence to practice autonomously
- Managers had lower perceptions of CHNs' confidence than CHNs did
- No statistical relationship existed between CHN confidence and educational level

Team Relationships

- Nurses in Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) and public health reported greater support from other nurses than did nurses in industry
- 67% of respondents reported positive physician-nurse collaborative relationships
- 87% of CHNs reported positive collaboration with other interdisciplinary colleagues
- There were no statistical differences among CHNs based on their levels of education, positions and sectors regarding partnerships, trusting relationships or client understanding of their roles

Work Environment

Material support for CHNs included reimbursement for travel, resources for patients, salary and employment security

- Perceptions of access to necessary equipment were consistent across sub sectors
- Visiting and agency nurses felt less job security than CHNs in other sectors
- CCAC nurses reported the heaviest workloads
- Only 56% of CHNs had an opportunity to debrief regularly
- Reports of visible nursing leadership, an enabler for optimal practice, varied across sectors but was least evident in industry and physician offices
- Managers reported more nursing leadership than did CHNs
- Managers reported fair pay and job security for CHNs more frequently than did CHNs
- Management agreed more frequently that workloads were fair and work environments safe than did CHN respondents
- CHNs identified trust and understanding of their role as enablers to practice

- 70% of CHNs reported they had flexibility to vary time spent with patients; nurses in mental health, Community Health Centres and industry reported the most flexibility
- 56% CHNs reported management support for addressing the determinants of health in their communities

Supportive Community Context

- CHNs believed communities that coordinate services and address the determinants of health support effective practice
- 53% of CHNs agreed provincial policies support their work

Conclusion

Community health nurses and managers had different perceptions about interdisciplinary team functioning, job security, pay, workload, safety and community support and coordination. Needs for CHNs will continually be redefined as challenges in health care arise. Enablers should be strengthened and barriers overcome to maintain an effective system to meet changing community needs.

Recommendations

For Management and Local Policy Makers

- Enhance CHN participation in decisions to address the changing needs of clients
- Include frontline CHNs in planning the allocation of material and equipment
- Design work schedules to ensure adequate time for appropriate client care
- Redesign work processes to ensure time for debriefing about clients and programs
- Reduce salary and job security differentials within and across community sectors
- Create strategies to mitigate physical and emotional workplace risk
- Disseminate government policy changes to staff in a timely fashion
- Allocate time, money and access to learning resources to CHNs in all sectors
- Fund management training for improving communication between management and nurses
- Reward nurses who provide effective health promotion interventions

For Provincial Government

- Design a publicity campaign that highlights the roles of community health services and how to access them

For Researchers

- Undertake research to provide data to support improved workforce planning

Next Steps

The Nursing Health Services Research Unit (McMaster site) is currently analyzing over 4,000 surveys received from CHNs across Canada. This analysis will provide a comparison of enablers and barriers for CHN practice among sectors and geographic regions across Canada.

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¹ Baumann, A., Underwood, J., Blythe, J., Ciliska, D., Ehrlich, A., Akhtar-Danesh, N., Alamaddine, M., Laporte, A., Deber, R., & Dragan, A. (2006, November). *Better Data: Better Performance, Community Health Nursing in Ontario*. Health Human Resource Series 7. Hamilton, Ontario: Nursing Health Services Research Unit, McMaster University.