

Knowledge and Education at Entry to Nursing Practice in Alberta

Edmonton - Today, the three Colleges that regulate nursing in the Province of Alberta, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA), the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta (CRPNA) and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta (CLPNA), released *Knowledge and Education at Entry to Nursing Practice in Alberta (2009)*, a report that identifies the similarities and differences in educational preparation among the nursing professions.

The report is the culmination of a three-year collaborative research project that examined the education of nurses and how each type of nurse relates to the other. There are three types of nurses in Alberta regulated under the Health Professions Act: Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN) and Registered Nurses (RN). This research, funded by Alberta Health and Wellness, found that the knowledge base of RN students at point of graduation is larger in scope, breadth and depth than that of LPN and RPN students. The RN students' knowledge base appears also to be inclusive of the LPN students' knowledge base. RPN students' knowledge base has common ground with portions of both LPN and RN students, with significant additional knowledge related to mental health.

In the present health care context, it is critical to use nurses' abilities, skills and potential as fully and strategically as possible. Individual knowledge and experience matter, so it is not as simple as specifying credentials appropriate to various health care roles. Patient complexity and stability, work experience, and system support are each vital in staffing decisions. Results of the research argue that for new graduates RPNs are well positioned for mental health work and to some extent beyond that; LPNs are best suited to dealing with stable patients; and RNs are prepared to deal with the full range of patient

conditions, including critical and rapidly changing patients and case management. The study also concludes that education of all groups prepares them for their current scope of practice and recommends full utilization of all nurses.

According to CARNA executive director Mary-Anne Robinson, “This study underscores the importance of having the right type of nurse caring for the right patient. In complex and unstable cases, the Registered Nurse’s role is particularly critical to safe care and positive patient outcomes.”

In responding to the results, Barbara Lowe, CRPNA executive director, says “This project clearly articulates the strength of Registered Psychiatric Nurses in mental health with their specific preparation in mental health care. The role of the RPN is increasingly crucial as mental health is integrated within the larger health system.”

Linda Stanger, CLPNA executive director, says ”This study confirms that all categories of nurse(LPN, RPN, RN) are well prepared to provide safe and effective patient-centred care. Full utilization of the skills of all nurses is key to a sustainable health care system.”

More research is needed to develop better understanding of how the three types of nurses can best be deployed for effective and efficient health care delivery in Alberta. Members of the Steering Committee involved with the project, representing all facets of nursing practice, administration, education, and research, are convinced that research of this nature offers an approach to examining thinking as a dimension of professional nursing knowledge. This approach provides a foundation for continuing research involving nurses in Alberta and elsewhere.

The full Knowledge and Education Report and Executive Summary are located on the websites of each College: www.nurses.ab.ca; www.crpna.ab.ca; www.clpna.com

About the Colleges

The three professional nursing regulatory bodies, CARNA, CLPNA, and CRPNA, are accountable to the public for the provision of safe, ethical, competent nursing care by their respective members through authority granted in provincial legislation. This includes initial and ongoing registration, continuing competence, practice support, and discipline. Each regulatory body is responsible for the development of codes of ethics, standards of practice, and the approval of nursing education programs. As well, each regulatory body has the authority to define the scope of practice of their respective members.

- 30 -

For more information or to arrange an interview contact:

Margaret Ward-Jack

T: 780.453.0515

C: 780.932.1376

F: 780.452.3276

mwardjack@nurses.ab.ca

Barbara Lowe

T: 780 434-7666

F: 780 436-4165

Barbara.Lowe@crpna.ab.ca

Linda Stanger

T: 780-484-8886

F: 780-484-9069

linda@clpna.com