



Opinion Editorial
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Canadians Can Count on Nurses

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As Canada's health ministers gather in Halifax this week to talk about the progress on health care, the average Canadian could be excused for wanting to shrug and turn away. Even though the crowded agenda includes important topics, like Canada's growing obesity and diabetes problems, the country's top-down management of health care is frighteningly complex on the surface and seems disconnected from the immediate concerns of most Canadians.

Enter Canada's registered nurses (RNs). Representatives of the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) will be in Halifax too, offering the perspective of the largest professional group in our national health-care system, including some new ideas from their own National Expert Commission. Some 268,000 strong, Canada's registered nurses have regularly added their voice to national discussions about the long-term transformation of our health-care system, and we've proactively shared new research and real evidence from the front lines.

The Commission's pivotal report, *A Nursing Call to Action: the Health of our Nation, the Future of our Health System*, recommends an approach to health-care transformation that takes advantage of the skills, expertise and know-how of RNs while creating a vision of how our health system could work more effectively. Most importantly, it speaks to the realities of individual Canadians and their families and their quest for good health.

The report offers a look at all of the elements that contribute to personal and national health. Its nine-point action plan speaks about improving and promoting health at the grassroots level (primary care) and takes better health to be critical to Canada's success as a nation.

More specifically, the report argues that Canada's future health depends on ending our reliance on acute care hospital services. Canadians need to stay healthy in their communities and throughout their lives, and they need support from governments and health professionals with the right tools and experience to do so. The report also emphasizes the need to pay particular attention to the people the system leaves behind.

It's no surprise, then, that the Commission favours community-based health teams as the basis for a sustainable health system, with professionals working to the full scope of their education and experience. The Commission says Canada must get its act together when it comes to measuring our success in delivering better health, better care and better value.

Canada's RNs welcome every opportunity to participate in a dialogue about the future of health care, because we see the system from all angles — from the top down and the bottom up, from the challenge of public policy to the toddler with a fever. To be a registered nurse is to be an advocate for patients, individually and collectively. Registered nurses care when people are sick and when they are striving to be well. We speak for real people in real situations and can pretty accurately reflect the expectations and needs of Canadians. So, when RNs offer a view about health care, you might as well line up millions of Canadians and their families behind them.

Canada's RNs expect the ministers to push forward with the joint initiatives and long-term planning needed to address our serious demographic, economic and social challenges. Finding the right solutions, engaging Canadians and working together to improve the health of the nation and the future of our health-care system has never been more important.

Let's hope our governments have plans and news to deliver soon about a long-term vision that makes sense to Canadians. Let's hope they will tell us that they know where they are going and that federal, provincial and territorial governments are truly prepared to work collaboratively to achieve that vision. Canadians can count on RNs when it comes to finding the real remedies in health care. Can they count on governments to listen and learn?