

Registration Baccalaureate Education For Registered Nurses In Ontario



COLLEGE OF NURSES
OF ONTARIO
ORDRE DES INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS DE L'ONTARIO

THE STANDARD OF CARE.

Introduction

In December 1998, the Council of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), the regulatory body for the nursing profession in Ontario, adopted new entry-to-practice competencies for registered nurses (RNs), skills and standards that newly graduated nursing students would require before entering the profession. In 2000, the Ontario government approved the College's recommendation that the entry-level requirement for new RNs become a baccalaureate degree in nursing, and enacted a regulatory amendment to reflect this change. The baccalaureate requirement is effective January 1, 2005.

Why is a Baccalaureate Necessary for all New RNs?

CNO's principal mandate is protecting the public interest by ensuring that Ontario nurses provide safe, effective and ethical care to clients. In a health care environment with advanced technology, where clients at all levels and in all settings have more complex care demands, RNs require greater levels of critical thinking and nursing knowledge than they did even a decade ago. Immediately upon graduation, RNs are expected to take on considerable responsibility rather than being mentored and gradually oriented to their responsibilities over an extended period. CNO felt it was necessary, in the public interest, to enhance entry requirements for registration as an RN in Ontario.

Baccalaureate education is necessary to ensure that newly prepared RNs have a foundation that equips them for the challenges they will face in today's health care system, and to ensure that the public receives the quality, competent care it deserves.

Why do Current Nurses and Nurse Employers Support Baccalaureate Education?

Ontario RNs eagerly anticipated this development for many years; the impetus for change came from them. In its consultation process, CNO found strong support

from nurses, student nurses and in particular from nurse employers. RN diploma graduates have found their range of employment opportunities narrowing in recent years, as more and more employers found advanced skills and critical thinking – those developed during baccalaureate preparation – to be essential for the position. Many experienced diploma RNs have chosen to enrol in post-diploma programs to obtain their baccalaureate and broaden their career opportunities.

Will Current Diploma-Educated RNs be Required to Obtain a Degree?

No. A basic tenet of CNO's legislatively mandated Quality Assurance Program is that Ontario nurses never stop learning. Through continuous self-assessment and professional development, all RNs, whatever their level of basic education, maintain competence in today's health care environment. It is new nurses for whom the baccalaureate is necessary. Nurses coming into the profession for the first time require the added basic education. Today, RNs may be required to make critical decisions and manage a complex caseload from the very first day. It is essential that their education prepares them for this challenge.

How has the Baccalaureate been Implemented?

Twenty-two of Ontario's community colleges have partnered with universities to offer the baccalaureate program. The majority of these programs began accepting students in September of 2001.

Has this Change Aggravated the Current Nursing Shortage?

There is no evidence that it has – not in the short term and particularly not in the long term. Until 2004, RN diploma programs will continue to graduate nurses while the new collaborative programs are beginning. The province has committed funding to increase the overall number of graduates of nursing programs in Ontario.

In the long term, CNO expects more bright young women and men to choose nursing as a profession, or bright mature minds to choose it as a second or even third career. When people make career choices, factors like independence, income potential, respect for the profession or opportunities for advancement and career movement (not to mention the ability to make a strong positive impact on people's lives) are primary considerations. In all these areas, the baccalaureate requirement makes nursing much more attractive.

For More Information

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