



“Dumbing down” of Quebec RN education irks nurses, MDs

Quebec’s plan to make all registered nurses graduate from a junior college program is a “huge step backward,” nursing leaders and medical educators say.

“This is clearly wrong,” said Dr. Patrick Vinay, dean of Medicine at the University of Montreal. “We need well-trained nurses who can collaborate with us. Without university education this bond is extremely difficult.”

The Quebec government announced Mar. 4 that all aspiring nurses must take a 3-year technical program at a CEGEP (community college) and then can decide whether to practise or go to university for “specialty” training. Quebec RNs now graduate from either a CEGEP or 1 of the province’s 9 university-based programs. The new rule takes effect in 2002.

Wendy McBride, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing, said it will deter would-be nurses from getting a baccalaureate degree because it will take so long. It also means that the 15% of nursing graduates who currently enter through other university programs will now have to graduate from the CEGEP program before enrolling at the university level.

“Nursing is a profession and as a profession it requires basic education at the baccalaureate level,” said

McBride. “We need the sciences and theories of nursing. It’s not a task-oriented profession.” University education is especially pertinent now, added Vinay, given nurses’ strong role in making decisions, organizing schedules, and delegating responsibilities and financial resources.

“We’re going backward,” said McBride. Elsewhere, diploma schools of nursing are closing or moving toward collaborative programs with universities. The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) supports baccalaureate entry to practice by 2000, but Quebec is not a CNA member.

Canada’s university schools of nursing and professional nursing associations, including the CNA, have written letters of protest to Quebec politicians, and the International Council of Nurses will also be writing.

The principals of McGill and Montreal Universities are both asking the government to change the rule. “We need both kinds of entries [to practice],” said Vinay. At university-affiliated hospitals, 30% of RNs are supposed to have a BScN, but Vinay said only 18% meet the requirement. The new rule will lower the percentage still further.

The arguments have had little impact on the Quebec government. It says the rules were changed in response to changing population needs and in consultation with a study group. CEGEP-educated nurses receive lower salaries than their university counterparts. In addition, their diplomas are not easily transferrable, so most of them stay in Quebec. Approximately 70% of Quebec’s 65 000 RNs are CEGEP graduates. — *Barbara Sibbald*

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Cool site

All current or aspiring medical researchers should be aware of Grantsnet (www.grantsnet.org/), a Web site launched in March by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which publishes *Science*, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. It promotes itself as a clearinghouse for funding opportunities for research

and training in the biological and medical sciences. It notes that scientists in training may have a hard time finding financial support, and lists hundreds of agencies that fund research. A free registration process must be completed before access to the database is granted. Initially I was too specific in my search and found no matches for an MD/PhD in bioinformatics. However, by broadening my search criteria I found links to grant applications and

fellowships from the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the National Institutes of Health, a pharmacy company and several other agencies. Clicking on Links takes you to a page with more specific information, including profiles of recent recipients. This site will be useful to anyone considering an academic fellowship or seeking grants for research projects.

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