

Medicine becoming a “female” profession in UK

After years of being encouraged to pursue nontraditional careers, females now account for 60% of British medical students. Now the country’s medical association is looking for ways to encourage more men to enter the profession.

Last year 3355 women entered medical school in the UK, compared with 2320 men. At the British Medical Association’s (BMA) annual meeting in July, delegates were warned that this gender split — 59%–41% — might result in a worsening shortage of MDs because women often leave practice to have children or opt to work part time. In 2001, Canadian medical schools admitted 1137 women and 784 men — the greatest differential ever.

James Coulston of the BMA’s Medical Students Committee said female secondary school students often earn better grades than males and perform better during interviews. While the committee was not advocating gender quotas or any kind of discrimination in favour of male applicants, it does want to encourage more males to consider medicine as a career.

A number of physicians opposed such a move, calling it sexist. One specialist said that if men were not entering the field, it was because the terms and conditions were not acceptable. Another participant warned against lowering academic standards and noted that many male doctors also want to work fewer hours.

The final motion from the BMA’s Junior Members Forum called on the Department of Health “to ensure that extra numbers of doctors are incorporated into future medical workforce planning in order to take full account of both changes in the gender mix of the medical workforce and the increased maternity and paternity rights of doctors.”

Earlier this year the government announced plans to hire 7500 more specialists and 2000 more general practitioners by the year 2004. Health authorities are also having to take into account a European Union directive, which provides that doctors will not be obliged to work longer than 48 hours per week. The first phase of this plan will apply to junior doctors in training in 2004. — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*

For first time, the head nurse is a man

The first-ever male president of the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) hopes his presence will help convince more men to consider nursing as a career. “We have to get past our thinking about what’s men’s work and what’s women’s work,” says Rob Calnan, a nurse educator and clinician from Victoria.

When he joined the profession 30 years ago, about 2% of Canadian nurses were male. Today men account for about 5% of the total, with Quebec leading the way at 15%.

“We need to make nursing attractive to everyone,” says Calnan, 48. “We never talk about nurse researchers, nurse scientists and so on, and we have to start showing it’s a lifelong career with lots of possibilities.”

Calnan, who is married to an emergency care nurse, has recognized those possibilities. After graduating from a hospital-based diploma program, he went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in nursing and a master’s of education, and focused on critical care nursing in both intensive care and coronary care units. He is now nurse manager for burns, plastic surgery, complex wounds, otolaryngology and urology at the Royal Jubilee Hospital and a teacher at the University of Victoria.

He became the first male president in the 94-year history of the CNA in June. (The CMA has had 3 female presidents in its 135-year history. The first, Dr. Bette Stephenson, was elected in 1974.) During his 2-year tenure, Calnan will focus on the nursing shortage, including the need for increased nursing enrolment. “We are turning down a thousand qualified applicants and then recruiting from other countries,” he says. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



Rob Calnan: time to make nursing careers more attractive to everyone

MD Web sites need disclaimer

Physicians who solicit business via the Internet should include a disclaimer that the information is for Canadian eyes only, the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) warns.

The distinction is important because doctors will be ineligible for legal help if they seek international business and are subsequently sued from outside Canada. They will be eligible if the suit is launched in Canada.

The CMPA’s suggested disclaimer reads: “This is a Canadian Web site. Its content is intended only for residents in Canada.” Without it, the association says a doctor could be considered to be soliciting foreign patients. Doctors are also considered to have solicited these patients if they advertise in a foreign country (including in the *Yellow Pages*) or quote prices in a foreign currency on their Web sites. — *CMAJ*