What are Post RN programs?
- Post RN programs are degree programs for diploma prepared registered nurses.
- They are offered by nine universities in Ontario (Lakehead, Laurentian, McMaster, Ottawa, Queen’s, Ryerson, Western, Windsor, York).
- They can be completed in full time or part time modes. Full time programs are usually two academic years in length. Part time programs vary in length according to individual university policies, but maximum time to complete the program may be up to eight years.
- In all nine universities, diploma prepared applicants are given two years of credit towards a four year degree based on their diploma education.
- Additional credit may be negotiated based on: other university or college courses taken post diploma graduation; successful completion of challenge exams; and/or a prior learning assessment process.
- Flexible delivery modes available in some universities include distance education options using: print-based media; audio and internet conferencing; flexible scheduling including full day and weekend sessions; or satellite courses offered in work sites.

How does Ontario compare with the rest of Canada?
- Ontario ranks 10th out of 12 provinces and territories in the proportion of degree prepared nurses (16.7%), only slightly ahead of PEI (16.0%) and Newfoundland (15.3%) (Canadian Nurses Association, 1997).
- In March 1999, Ontario colleges and universities signed a degree completion accord which recommends that degree completion programs such as nursing be 1.4 to 1.8 years in length (or 7-9 full-year courses) (Council of Ontario Universities, 1999).
- Until recently the trend in the Atlantic provinces was for the equivalent of three academic year Post RN programs. The University of New Brunswick has moved to a two academic year program.
- In the western provinces, there is movement toward a one calendar year Post RN program as at the University of British Columbia.
- The standard continues to be the equivalent of two academic years.
- All across Canada there is increased demand for enhanced flexibility in program delivery, more portability of course credits across Canada, and better recognition for prior learning derived from non-formal educational experiences.

What is the enrollment picture in Ontario?
- Admission to Post RN programs increased by 149% from 1992 to 1997.
- Total enrollment (both full time and part time) also increased by 26% during this time frame.
- In 1998 over one third of the total Ontario enrollment was in Ryerson’s program. Almost half were enrolled in Laurentian, McMaster, Ottawa and York programs. The remaining 20% are enrolled in smaller programs throughout the province.
• From 1992-1997, the number of graduates from Post RN programs increased by 35%.
• The number of Post RN graduates in 1996/97 was 431.
• In 1996 the number of diploma graduates was 2,193 and the number of admissions to Post RN programs was 788 (Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing, 1992-1997).
• There are 109,098 nurses in Ontario, and 83.1% are diploma prepared (Canadian Nurses Association, 1997). If only 50% of those nurses wished to access Post RN education, at the current rate of admission to Post RN programs it would take more than 55 years to process everyone.

What are the contextual factors influencing Post RN programs?
• Diploma prepared nurses are feeling increased pressure to complete a degree in nursing because of:
  › A need to enhance personal knowledge and skills to cope with the increased complexity of client care requirements and the changing health care system.
  › Increased demand in the marketplace for degree prepared nurses.
  › A desire to increase career flexibility and advancement.
  › The change in Entry to Practice regulations by the College of Nurses and Ministry of Health and Long Term Care requiring that the educational level for new graduates entering the profession in 2005 must be a baccalaureate degree in nursing (Risk & Cook, 1998, MOHLTC, 2000). While the College of Nurses ensures that all Registered Nurses holding membership with the College on December 31, 2004 will not be required to complete a nursing degree to maintain membership, many diploma-prepared nurses may feel increased need to complete a degree to enhance personal marketability.
• Economic constraints within the university sector and the mechanisms for funding make it difficult for universities to expand their Post RN programs unless it is at the expense of other nursing programs.
• Planning for and funding changes to the Post RN education system in Ontario are challenging because after 2005, the demand for Post RN programs will likely accelerate but eventually drop off.

What is needed in the system?
• More extensive human resource modelling/simulation so that the size of post RN cohorts, geographical/regional implications, and the impact of timing can be predicted more accurately.
• Increased number of spaces in Post RN programs especially in areas outside the Toronto area.
• A flexible province-wide system of course and program offerings that provide for alternative learning environments (e.g., computer mediated learning) and distance education.
• Portability of credits across educational institutions, from college to university and from university to university.
• A provincial system of credit for prior learning accomplished through formal academic processes or through experience.
• Some groups have suggested a provincial approach to Post RN education modelled on the Council of University Programs in Nursing (COUPN) consortium approach to the Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner Program resulting in collaboration on curriculum design, development and delivery to reduce duplication and maximize resources (Joint Provincial Nursing Committee, 1996).
• Formal and informal collaborative partnerships between colleges where the majority of specialty certificate programs are undertaken and Post RN programs so that credit transfer can be built into the system from the beginning and the best resources from both sectors can be maximized.
• Enhanced workplace support for degree completion (e.g., tuition support/reimbursement and flexible scheduling).

July 10, 2000

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References - Post RN Fact Sheet


