

## **Nursing shortage acute: report; Byline: SUE BAILEY, THE CANADIAN PRESS**

A critical shortage of registered nurses is on track to hit 60,000 by 2022 unless governments act, says a new report by the Canadian Nurses Association.

Kaaren Neufeld, president of the professional advocacy group, says patients already suffering long wait times will bear the brunt if nothing is done to ease burnout and flagging morale.

The report tracks demographic demands alongside nursing trends to forecast the shortfall. There were almost 217,000 registered nurses in 2007 -- already a shortage of 11,000 full-time positions, it says.

"I would like Canadians to try and imagine if all the nurses working full-time in ... Alberta and British Columbia combined were not available to practise within the health-care system -- how radically we would have to change our expectations about what the system can provide for us," Neufeld said of the 2022 scenario.

Ottawa and the provinces must work with unions and employers to boost numbers in nursing schools and in hospitals and clinics across the country, she said.

"This is not something we can afford any longer to just take one strategy and focus on (it)."

The report, "Tested Solutions for Eliminating Canada's Registered Nurse Shortage," says increasing productivity with computerized health records and other nursing supports could cut the shortage by almost half.

It also urges more enrolment and support in nursing schools, and changes that would ease workload and increase job satisfaction.

One idea is to allow some staff to work 80% of their usual shifts and spend the rest upgrading skills or working on special projects.

The absentee rate for nurses now averages 14 days a year -- about twice as high as other professions. Cutting that rate in half would be like adding 7,000 full-time nurses, says the study.

The sheer stress of overwork, short-staffing and lack of sometimes basic equipment takes its toll, said **Linda Silas**, president of the **Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions**. The umbrella group represents 158,000 members.

"It gets to a point where you have nurses so tired that when one of their colleagues calls in sick, they just say: 'Give me a warm body' -- regardless if he or she has the education."

Personal care workers are heavily relied on in some regions.

"We need (them), don't get me wrong," Silas said. "But for patient safety and quality care, you need the nurses around and we shouldn't jeopardize this because of the shortage."

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