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Workforce restructuring threatens patient safety

Moncton, New Brunswick (May 27, 2014) - Today the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions published a new report which calls for nurses, patients and their families to safeguard our health care system and to reject irresponsible workforce redesign. Valuing Patient Safety: Responsible Workforce Design provides stark evidence of the effects of ill-considered experiments in the delivery of patient care. Workforce redesign refers to nursing care delivery, and changes to staff mix and staffing levels are the two most common, outward signs. It is often driven by executive administrative decisions, but even small changes can cause a domino effect which directly impacts nursing care delivery and patient care. Heavy workloads, excessive overtime and increases in injuries and illness often result. The report points out that inevitably as workloads rise, patients' quality of care declines.

The report highlights the National Health Service (NHS) England and the 2013 Francis Inquiry into unnecessary deaths, patient injuries and gross neglect resulting from prioritizing budgets over quality patient care. "As detailed in Valuing Patient Safety, the NHS England tragedy is a dire warning to Canada on the risks of pursuing a similar path," says Linda Silas, President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

"As nurses, we must act to protect our patients and reverse the dangerous trends in health care. It is up to us, as health care professionals, to speak up for patients, and make our voices heard so that everyone knows what is at stake," added Linda Silas.

Valuing Patient Safety argues that patients must be at the forefront of any redesign decisions. This means patient priority care needs must be properly assessed using real time tools, based on factors such as acuity, stability and complexity. Once patient needs are determined, nurses and their managers should base staffing assignments on the best fit between patient needs and nurse competencies.

"Nurses must respond as a unified voice to those who want to define or control our practice. As a discipline, we have specialized

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knowledge and unique competencies,” Says Marilyn Quinn, President of the New Brunswick Nurses Union.

Dr. Maura MacPhee, the report’s author and Associate Professor at UBC’s School of Nursing, noted: “It is vitally important that our health care system become more open, transparent and accountable so that health care providers, patients, their families, and the public have the information they need to influence and engage proactively with decision makers in our health care system.”

Valuing Patient Safety is a wake-up call for health care decision makers: its recommendations must be heeded in implementing any workforce redesign in Canada.

Get the full report on CFNU’s website at https://nursesunions.ca/sites/default/files/valuing_patient_safety_web_may_2014.pdf

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The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) represents close to 200,000 nurses and student nurses. Our members work in hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health care, and our homes. The CFNU speaks to all levels of government, other health care stakeholders and the public about evidence-based policy options to improve patient care, working conditions and our public health care system.

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