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CANADIAN NURSES ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION DES INFIRMIÈRES ET INFIRMIERS DU CANADA

**Brief to the House of Commons  
Standing Committee**

**on Citizenship  
and Immigration**

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CANADIAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

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# BRIEF TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

## IMPORTANCE OF IMMIGRATION

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) recognizes the role that immigration plays in Canada's productivity. It also appreciates that the demographic realities of an aging workforce and slowing labour growth place an even greater emphasis on immigration as a source of skills and knowledge. Currently, about 1,500 new nurses educated outside Canada achieve licences to practise in Canada each year. In comparison, about 6,000 licences are issued each year to nurses who were educated in Canada.

Immigration is one recognized strategy to ensure sufficient numbers of knowledge workers in the health sciences. Many health professions in Canada, including nursing, are reporting shortages in personnel. A 30 per cent shortage of registered nurses is projected for the next decade. Steps have been taken to alleviate this shortage, including increasing the number of admissions at Canadian nursing schools and improving working conditions to retain more nurses. Nonetheless, CNA believes that effectively addressing the nursing shortage requires a national, integrated health human resource strategy that includes the recognition of immigration as one tactic.

The nurse immigration process begins when an internationally educated nurse considers immigrating to Canada and continues until she or he is integrated into the workforce.

## PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH

CNA believes that the utilization of immigration as a tactic requires a principles-based approach. These principles include transparency, competency-based, fairness, universality and an ethical approach.

### *Transparency*

Foreign workers seeking jobs within Canada are entitled to full disclosure and information on employment policies and practices, including applicable regulatory requirements. CNA believes that this information should be available to workers before they come to Canada.

Potential nurse immigrants should receive information on the roles and responsibilities of a registered nurse in Canada, the health system, the licensure process and requirements, the labour market,

salaries and more. Once they apply to immigrate to Canada, they should also be entitled to information on the status of their application and any reasons for non-eligibility.

CNA receives numerous calls from nurses all over the world interested in working in Canada. Most of them do not understand that nursing is a regulated profession here, let alone that it is regulated on a provincial/territorial level. CNA also receives calls from international recruiters (for example, at least three last month) who need to know what is required for nurses to work in Canada. The transparency and accessibility of basic information will assist individuals in making informed decisions before they come to Canada.

**To achieve transparency, CNA proposes that the federal government fund the development and dissemination of electronic information targeted toward internationally educated nurses.** This information could be linked to the “Going to Canada” Web site. It would contain information to support informed decision making by individuals before they come to Canada.

### *Competency-Based*

CNA believes that recognition of the qualifications of foreign-educated workers should include recognition of competencies and experience, and not just educational credentials. Credential assessment alone can be misleading. Canada is an attractive country, and immigrants may employ inappropriate measures to gain the qualifications to work in Canada. The purchase of educational credentials through the Internet is just one example.

In addition, the continuing proliferation of nursing educational institutions around the world makes it increasingly difficult for regulatory bodies to validate transcriptions and verify curricular content.

Thus, it is necessary to assess competencies at an individual level rather than just verifying credentials at an institutional level. Assessing competencies allows for incorporating both formal education and experiential learning.

Credential review is just one aspect of assessment. Language proficiency is another key requirement for licensure.

**CNA believes that results from the Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses and from the research on prior learning assessment and recognition for nurses, funded through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, should be incorporated into the overall assessment approach for nurse immigrants.**

### *Fairness*

The process of recognition should be fair. The same criteria and assessment used with Canadian graduates should be applied to international applicants. All nurses working in Canada must meet the same standards. They must all meet the same educational requirements, have the same language proficiency, and write and pass the Canadian Registered Nurse Exam.

Regulatory bodies have a legislated duty through the provincial/territorial governments to maintain public safety. An internationally educated nurse must provide the same quality of nursing care as a Canadian-educated nurse would. For example, for a patient with prostate cancer, the nurse must be knowledgeable about the chemotherapy drug and its pharmacokinetics; he or she must be able to calculate the correct dosage based on the patient's body surface area, safely administer the chemotherapy and provide patient teaching on potential side effects. Patient safety and, potentially, patient lives are at risk. For example, a nurse caring for a patient with diabetes must ensure clear communication in order to instruct the patient on how to self-administer insulin. As another example, a nurse, whether educated in or outside of Canada, would be expected to provide culturally sensitive diet and exercise counselling to a family with an obese child.

The United States, which also has a massive nursing shortage, has redesigned its approach to assessing and licensing internationally educated nurses, including Canadians, by imposing an extra measure. This contravenes the notion of treating all applicants fairly.

Fairness also applies to the burden of the assessment process. The number of applicants for nursing licensure in Canada is increasing exponentially. Many provincial regulatory bodies are reporting double the number of applicants in less than one year. Increased volume often means an extended time for delivery of the assessment. Applications can now take up to 18 months to process. There is a component of user pay for this service, but the bulk of the burden is placed on the regulatory body, which is, in turn, funded by people licensed to practise in Canada. The increased focus on internationally educated nurse applicants is resource intensive and competes with other equally important priorities.

**CNA proposes that the federal government support nursing and other health professional regulatory bodies in a manner similar to how it supported the medical regulatory bodies.** Medical regulatory bodies received three million dollars to offset the increased demand to process international applicants.

### *Universality*

CNA supports a national approach to the recognition of foreign workers' qualifications. The CNA Board of Directors, which is comprised of the presidents of provincial and territorial registered nursing associations/colleges, passed a motion at its March 2003 meeting to co-ordinate (pending financial support) the development of products and services, such as a national assessment centre, to support the integration of international nurse applicants into Canada. A national approach would reduce duplication, create efficiencies and streamline processes. Other professions, including engineers and physicians, are also exploring a national approach.

**CNA proposes that the federal government fund the infrastructure required to achieve a national approach to the recognition of foreign workers' qualifications.** This infrastructure would be appropriate for other health professions and would also support education upgrading, language training and social and cultural integration.

### *Ethical Approach*

CNA recognizes the right of individual nurses to migrate. We also confirm the potential beneficial outcomes of the multicultural practice and learning opportunities in migration. However, CNA acknowledges that international migration may have adverse effects on health care quality in countries seriously depleted of their nursing workforce. The International Council of Nurses reports a global nursing shortage. CNA does not support the unethical recruitment of registered nurses from countries that are or will be experiencing a shortage.

CNA condemns the practice of recruiting nurses from countries where authorities have failed to implement sound human resource planning and to seriously address the problems that cause nurses to leave the profession.

**CNA calls for a national health human resource strategy that co-ordinates employment, education, social, health and immigration policies to enhance the productivity and potential of all nurses.**

### **CALL TO ACTION**

The assessment of internationally educated nurses for licensure in Canada is complex. Improvements are essential to enable each immigrant to achieve her or his full potential. These improvements must be done within a framework of ensuring patient safety. CNA is committed to implementing a new approach, one that is based on the principles of transparency, competency-based, fairness, universality and an ethical approach.

CNA calls on the federal government to provide leadership in developing this principles-based approach. Canada needs:

- **the development and dissemination of electronic information targeted toward internationally educated nurses;**
- **support for nursing and other health professional regulatory bodies to offset the increased demand to process international applicants;**
- **the infrastructure to achieve a national approach to the recognition of foreign workers' qualifications and their integration into the workforce; and**
- **a national health human resource strategy that co-ordinates employment, education, social, health and immigration policies to enhance the productivity and potential of all nurses.**



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