Joint Position Statement

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY OF NURSING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

POSITION

Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) believe the following:

• Flexible programs promote access and increase educational opportunities for nurses through the use of creative program delivery models including communication technologies and other methods to enhance access to learning.
• Flexible delivery of baccalaureate, master’s, doctoral, specialty and continuing education programs in nursing is essential to Canadian nurses.
• Flexible delivery can respond to nurses’ needs for life-long learning to:
  - Attain, maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills as changes occur in the health system;
  - Provide safe high quality evidence-based nursing care; and
  - Balance family, work and educational commitments.

The responsibility for flexible nursing programs is shared among individual nurses, nursing organizations, employers, nurse educators and researchers, educational institutions and government. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following.

Individual Nurses are accountable for:

• Continuing to maintain and enhance their competence throughout their professional lives; and
• Providing educational institutions with feedback about their requirements for flexibility and strategies to facilitate professional learning.

Nursing organizations, including nursing specialty groups, are responsible for:

• Partnering with educational institutions to facilitate and promote flexible nursing education programs;
• Communicating information about flexible programs to their members;
• Working with education and service groups to determine enrolment needs for the health system; and
• Working collaboratively to lobby governments for funding and infrastructure (e.g., buildings and technology) to further develop, deliver and evaluate flexible models for programs.

Employers are responsible for:

• Providing a wide range of clinical placements for all nursing education programs; and
• Supporting nurses’ efforts to access continuing education and removing barriers for those who wish to attend educational programs. Examples of ways to support nurses include nurse employee study leaves and partnering to provide funding support.
Nursing educators and educational institutions are accountable for establishing, coordinating and providing flexible programs that are accessible to all Canadian nurses regardless of where they live or their resource capacities.

Nurse researchers and nursing educators are accountable for carrying out scholarly activities to provide nurses with evidence that can be used to continuously improve the delivery of nursing education programs in all practice domains.

Governments are responsible for promoting and funding flexible programs and infrastructure that will attract and retain a competent, qualified and vibrant nursing workforce.

BACKGROUND

Canada is a world leader in providing high quality nursing education programs and in developing and using new information technology. In light of these factors, the nursing profession has the opportunity to further develop flexible approaches to nursing education. However, the nursing community recognizes that in order to maintain Canada as a world leader in providing quality nursing programs that flexible approaches must maintain standards of rigor and academic excellence established in more traditional programs.

Canada’s educational institutions have considerable experience in using technology and other methods to increase accessibility of programs for students, yet research shows that nurses continue to perceive barriers to attending and accessing educational programs.1 Highest ranked barriers include distance, family and work obligations, expense of tuition and travel, lack of employer financial support, lack of available relevant educational activities and lack of replacement for study leave.2

Given the geographical vastness of Canada, the shortage of nurses, the requirements of continuing competence and the inconsistency in the variation of access to flexible programs across the country, there is a need for nursing programs to be as flexible as possible while maintaining a high quality. The Canadian Nursing Advisory Committee4 recommends that government work with nursing schools to make maximal use of distance education and in-person educational opportunities for nurses who work in rural and isolated settings.

There are many schools of nursing in Canada who deploy methods to keep their program as flexible as possible while maintaining the high quality of their programs. The strategies they use include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Use of a variety of tools to assess eligibility criteria for admission to programs, for example, prior learning assessment;
• Use of a variety of instructional techniques;
• Offering students the option of part-time or full-time study;
• Use of tools to improve responsiveness to learner needs;
• Offering shortened, lengthened or condensed programs for eligible students; and
• Use of the Internet and other technologies for delivery of the programs.

Approved by the CNA Board of Directors, March 2004

1 (Caty, Tilleczek, Pong, Michel, & Lemieux, 2002).
2 (Caty et al., 2002).
3 (CNAC, 2002)
References:

Also see:
Canadian Nurses Association
Guidelines for Continuing Nursing Education Programs (2000)

International Council of Nurses