



For immediate release

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## **Experience counts! New nurses' unions study offers real strategies to keep nurses over 45 at work**

**Ottawa:** Important implications for the health care system are coming to light as the majority of Canada's current nursing workforce moves toward retirement. In 2004, Canada had more Registered Nurses (RNs) ages 50-54 employed in nursing than any other group. Given that, on average, nurses retire in their late 50's, the looming nursing shortage may be further exacerbated by prospective retirees not being replaced by nearly adequate recruitment.

The First Ministers have acknowledged that Canada is facing shortages of many health care providers including nurses. They have identified recruitment and retention strategies as a national priority. Although many provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada have developed strategies and accompanying programs to address nursing recruitment and retention, little research and few strategies have specifically targeted the retention of those experienced nurses over the age of forty-five. Improving the retention of these senior nurses may well be a critical factor in gaining the necessary time for the recruitment rate to increase sufficiently to address this shortfall.

Today, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) is releasing the first Canadian discussion paper on retaining these experienced nurses. *Taking Steps Forward, Retaining and Valuing Experienced Nurses*, by Arlene Wortsman and Susanna Janowitz, was made possible through a generous contribution from Health Canada.

With two objectives: the identification of innovative and successful approaches in current workplace practices and collective agreements resulting in healthier work environments and increased retention of older nurses (45+), and to assist in framing discussions between nursing unions and employers, the study is a first of its kind in Canada.

"This paper shows that unions, employers and governments can – and should – work together to create supportive environments for nurses," said CFNU President Linda Silas, RN. "We suggest several strategies including developing workplace mentoring programs pairing experienced nurses with new graduates, phased-in retirement options, and increased nurse involvement in workplace decision-making. These strategies can succeed with collaboration and trust from all parties."

The study reinforced that experienced nurses want their skills and experience to be valued by employers. Participation on workplace nursing committees, and the ability to transfer knowledge gained through years of hands-on care to new nurses through mentoring or preceptoring programs are attractive to experienced nurses and may keep them practicing longer.



“Our research shows that the current environment does not support experienced nurses who want to continue to work, but in a reduced capacity,” said study author Arlene Wortsman. “Experienced nurses told us that their current practice environments are stressful and pressured. The creative projects featured in this study may provide models to keep these nurses involved and in the workplace beyond age 55.”

“From surveys, 35% of nurses under 45 years of age plan to leave nursing before the age of 55,” notes Silas. “Those closer to age 55 (41%) plan to leave before the age of 60. But, we know that with special retention initiatives, their plans could change. Adapting the work environment to meet the needs of these nurses with better nurse-patient ratios, education leaves and skills upgrading, and more pre and post-retirement options will keep these nurses where they want to be – providing quality patient care to Canadians. It’s not rocket science, but good nurse workforce planning,” concluded Silas.

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The CFNU is the largest organization of nurses in Canada with 130,000 affiliated members from coast to coast. Website – [www.cfnu.ca](http://www.cfnu.ca)

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