

Harris Government Must Act Now to Deal With Nursing Shortage

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Toronto and Hamilton – The Medical Reform Group today called on the Harris government to stop dragging their feet, and to take action to deal with the immediate nursing shortage in Ontario, and the prospect of an increasing shortage in the coming years.

The Harris government has recently acknowledged they are 6,000 nurses short of their target for hiring 12,000 new nurses by the end of 2000. In April of this year, nurses submitted to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care their report called *Ensuring the Care Will Be There: Report on Nursing Recruitment and Retention in Ontario*.

"This nursing report identifies the problem, and necessary remedies, accurately," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt. "The Tory government has tried to save money by cutting full-time nursing positions, and reducing salaries and benefits. They have cut the numbers of nurses in many health care settings, creating impossibly stressful working environments. It is no wonder they are having problems finding nurses to fill the jobs." The nursing report suggests that between 60,000 and 90,000 new recruits must enter the nursing labour force in Ontario by the year 2011 to ensure access to nursing services across the province.

"Government planning must emphasize creation of full-time permanent nursing positions," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. "This will help to enhance continuity of care and allow nurses to feel satisfied about the important work they do every day. Current workloads are making it almost impossible for nurses to deliver the kind of attention and care that they know their patients need and deserve. An adequate number of full time positions will help create the conditions that are necessary to attract new nurses in sufficient numbers to meet the increased need for nurses in the next decade."

"The money is there to allow prompt action," Dr. Guyatt concluded. "If the Harris government didn't continue to put tax cuts – including a \$3.9 billion tax break for corporations in their 200 budget – ahead of health care, they could solve the problem by quickly creating the attractive full time positions that would draw graduate nurses back in to the system."

