

Nurses Survey Highlights Government Mismanagement

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The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) have conducted a survey, released last Friday, of nurses who left Canada to work in other countries. The results highlight the adverse impact of the Harris governments health care cutbacks on the nursing profession.

One key finding has to do with reasons for leaving. Prior to 1990, of those who left Canada, over 50 per cent did so seeking better weather or travel opportunities. This was true of less than 6 per cent who left in the last decade. Overwhelmingly, those who left in the 1990's cited downsizing and lack of full time employment as reasons for departing.

The Harris governments cost-cutting strategy has shown a particular disregard for nurses. Full-time positions have evaporated: less than 52 per cent of Ontario nurses currently work full time. Nurses are working in increasingly stressful environments, with increasing patient burdens and decreasing support.

The Harris government has acknowledged the nursing shortage in Ontario, but are failing to meet their own targets for recruiting additional nurses. Ontario must make the creation of full time positions with acceptable nurse-patient ratios a top priority.

The total burden of Harris personal income tax cuts is now approximately \$27 billion, with another \$8 billion in corporate tax cuts. The government has placed tax cuts ahead of maintaining high quality health care for Ontario citizens. The money is clearly available to reverse the deterioration.

In responding to public opinion surveys, Canadians consistently put maintaining universal, high-quality health care ahead of tax cuts. Ensuring an adequate supply of nurses working in reasonable patient-care environments must be part of a move back to sensible priorities that reflect Canadians values.