



LPN utilization rises significantly in B.C.

A recently released report on nursing in Canada shows that the numbers of Licensed Practical Nurses in B.C. have grown dramatically over the last four years.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information report *Regulated Nurses: Canadian Trends, 2005 to 2009*, the number of LPNs working in B.C. grew by nearly 2,700 during that period. That's a 55 per cent increase, compared to 18 per cent nationally.

But the report also shows that B.C. continues to employ the lowest number of LPNs per 100,000 population, when compared to any other province in Canada.

HEU's secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says she is encouraged, overall, by the increased numbers of LPNs in the health care system.

"Clearly, significant progress is being made as health authorities realize just how critical the LPN role is to modern nursing care," she says. "But along with the advancement of their profession, our LPN members want health authorities to commit to increased training and recognition for their additional roles and skills."

She also points out that while LPNs are taking on more responsibilities in general, LPN utilization still differs significantly between regions, facilities and sometimes between units in the same hospital.

"And when we compare LPN utilization here in B.C. to the rest of Canada, we are still lagging behind."

In 2009, LPNs represented 22 per cent of Canada's total regulated nursing workforce, which also includes RNs and Registered Psychiatric Nurses. In B.C. however, LPNs represent about 19 per cent.

"That's a substantial improvement over 2005, when LPNs represented just 14 per cent of regulated nurses in B.C.," says Darcy, "but the upward trend needs to continue."

And she says, "Although the number of RNs in B.C. also grew – by 3,100 over the last four years – both the number of LPNs and RNs per 100,000 population in this province are the lowest in Canada.

"There's no question, this province needs more nurses – LPNs and RNs – to make up this gap, and to ensure we have a full nursing complement to meet the needs of British Columbians."

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