

More Nurses Needed Now: A Year in Review

2006 has been a very busy year at SUN. In addition to negotiating collective agreements with the All Nations Healing Hospital, Extendicare Canada Inc. and the Canadian Blood Services, SUN has been pressuring the government to address the shortage of RNs and RPNs in Saskatchewan, to set recruitment targets and develop strategies to retain the nurses we have while recruiting others to the province.

Throughout 2006 SUN has been involved in numerous activities concerning healthcare in Saskatchewan. Below is a comprehensive list of SUN's activities.

- In the fall of 2005 SUN was asked to provide input into the Health Human Resource Plan for Saskatchewan. In order to provide a response which was detailed and accurate, SUN requested information from the CEOs of all the Health Regions in October 2005. No information was received by SUN.
- From past experience SUN was aware that the government may not provide all of the information requested, and embarked upon the *Staffing for Professional Standards Survey* in October 2005.
- The new year came and SUN had still not received answers to our questions from the Department of Health or the CEOs of the Health Regions.
- In early February 2006, SUN representatives met with Bonnie Blakely, Executive Director, Health Human Resource Planning, to stress their concerns about the data SUN members had been supplying in regard to the number of vacancies in the Province.
- **February 20th** - SUN wrote once again to the Minister of Health requesting answers to our questions.
- **February 23rd - (morning)** SUN hosted a press conference releasing the shocking results from the survey we conducted and the need for 600 more RNs and RPNs in the province. (News coverage spanned from Lloydminster to Yorkton to Swift Current reaching members, communities and politicians.)
- **February 23rd (afternoon)** - members of the general public contacted SUN describing personal situations of their own that support our request for 600 more RNs and RPNs.
- **March 14th** - SUN representatives met with Mr. Don McMorris, Health Critic for the Opposition (Sask Party) stressing once again our concerns regarding the growing nursing shortage.

More
**Nurses Needed
Now ...**



**Just ask a
Registered Nurse**

- **March 15th (morning)** - The Saskatchewan Party issues a media release supporting SUN's request for 600 more RNs and RPNs.
- **March 15 – 17th** - The need for recruiting and retaining Registered nurses (including RPNs) in Saskatchewan became a hot issue on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.
- **March 16th** - SUN representatives speak to media in response to Sask Party support.
- **March 20th** - SUN representatives met with Lynne Digney-Davis, Principle Nursing Advisor for Saskatchewan Health, and Ron Knaus, from the Health Human Resource Branch. SUN's main focus for the meeting was to receive data on current vacancies, projected retirement numbers and the government's strategy for retaining and recruiting nurses to the province. While some data was received, it was not the information SUN had requested.
- **March 22nd (10:00am)** – SUN representatives met with the Minister of Health, Len Taylor. Throughout this meeting it became evident that the Department of Health is not willing to work with SUN at this time.
- **March 22nd (12 noon)** – SUN issues a media releases announcing their disappointment.
- **March 22nd (1:30 pm)** – Don McMorris, Health Critic for the Opposition (Sask Party) brings the subject and the morning's meeting to Question Period for discussion.
- **March 23rd** Here we are preparing for the next steps
 - Week of March 27th a letter to the CEO of each Health Region will be sent once again requesting information on vacancies and projected retirement figures.
 - Section 11 provides a listing of actions and mechanisms SUN members, locals and SDCs can utilize to pursue professional practice issues.
- **April 6th** – 2006/2007 Provincial Budget is announced. The budget dedicated 3.2 billion to health care with no attention paid to the retention and recruitment of nurses, registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses, in this budget.
- **April 25th to 27th** – SUN's 32nd Annual Meeting in Yorkton focuses on the shortage of registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses in the province. SUN President Rosalee Longmoore spoke of the need for action and solidarity among SUN members in the months ahead. Donna Trainor, Acting Executive Director's speech questioned whether Saskatchewan's nursing shortage was approaching a crisis status "By Design or Neglect" from the Saskatchewan Government.

SUN members passed the following resolution at the Annual Meeting:

“Whereas the Saskatchewan government, SAHO and health care employers have demonstrated a chronic disregard and unwillingness to act to avert the health care access and patient safety consequences of a deepening nursing shortage for Saskatchewan nurses and the public;

Therefore, be it resolved that SUN engage and support nurses and the public to ensure that patient safety, access and professional practice concerns are acted upon promptly and decisively;

Further be it resolved that SUN engage nurses, employers, nursing colleges, other stakeholders and the public in order to develop, support and implement a comprehensive nursing strategy for Saskatchewan, with specific targets and actions to ensure that Saskatchewan citizens have timely access to quality health care services.”

- **May 2006** – SUN participated in numerous meetings with the Health Department in an effort to negotiate an agreement for SUN and Saskatchewan Health to work together on retention and recruitment strategies for RNs/RPNs.
- **May 3rd** – SUN members attend the SRNA Annual meeting held in Regina to hear the Minister of Health speak to the delegates in attendance. Minister Taylor would not take questions from the delegates.
- **May 16th** – SUN writes a letter to Deborah Tamlyn, President of the Canadian Nurses Association, in response to the CNA’s Letter to the Editor published on March 31st. *“We are puzzled about why you would be providing political support for a Saskatchewan health workforce action plan which SUN has publicly identified on several occasions as seriously flawed. We can only conclude that you have been provided with inaccurate information regarding the plan.”*
- **May 19th** – SUN submits a letter to the Editors of newspapers across Saskatchewan asking *“Why has Saskatchewan Health been reluctant to sit down with SUN, in genuine partnership, to develop an immediate and long term action plan to fill the vacancies, reopen the closed beds and work to solve the nursing shortage?”*
- **May 25th** – SUN met with Premier Calvert in Saskatoon in hopes of receiving a commitment from the government to work with SUN on retention and recruitment strategies for RNs and RPNs. SUN left the meeting with the Premier feeling optimistic that they had his support.
- **June 10th & 11th** – SUN distributes informational leaflets to the residents of the Weyburn – Big Muddy Constituency in preparation of the June 19th bi-election for a seat in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.
- **June 14th** – An update on current events is distributed to all SUN members.
- **June 15th** – SUN Members in North Battleford distribute informational flyers to the public during Premier Calvert’s Annual Bus Tour of the province.

- **July 2006** – SUN meets with government representatives to continue to press for cooperation on a comprehensive retention and recruitment strategy for RNs and RPNs. Discussions revealed government was unwilling to do so.
- **August 30th** – SUN members in the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region distribute informal leaflets at the Farmers Market on Scarth Street in downtown Regina.
- **September 5th** – Minister Taylor announces two new committees to advise him on how to address the retention and recruitment of health professionals in Saskatchewan; one committee is to focus on nurses and the other is to focus on allied health professionals.

“The only thing accomplished by this announcement is that the government finally acknowledges a need for action. It is not enough to address the shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) in the province. SUN has been asking for aggressive action with specific targets for retention and recruitment since February,” said Rosalee Longmoore, SUN President in a media release issued the same day.

- **September 18th** – SUN advertises in the program for the Persephone Theatre (Saskatoon) production of *“Strike! The Musical”*
- **September 28th** – SUN conducts their second Staffing for Professional Standards Survey to track RN/RPN staffing changes throughout the province. SUN’s hope is to see an improvement in the numbers; our fear and the harsh reality is the vacancy numbers will have increased.
- **October 5th** – SUN took the opportunity to speak to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. The subject – retaining and recruiting registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses in the province.

“Our presentation focused on what SUN believes must be a priority issue for the next federal budget-the urgent need for investment in a comprehensive, pan-Canadian, health human resources plan,” stated Marlene Brown, First Vice President to SUN, in a media release issued on October 5th.

- **October 12th** – SUN members in the Cypress Health Region speak to the region’s Board of Directors emphasizing the need to retain and recruit RNs and RPNs to the Cypress Region. Members in the region made a similar presentation 2 years ago with little success. The current Board of Directors has committed to working with SUN to address the nursing shortage issue in the Region; the Board has also requested to have SUN return in April 2007 to update them on the situation.
- **October 18th** – The Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) released their third report on Workforce Trends in Nursing. The report indicated that Saskatchewan still has the lowest retention rate in Canada. The new CIHI data shows that Manitoba retains 3 out of 4 nurses, while Saskatchewan is losing 1 out of 3.

- **October 18th** – Minister Taylor announces a new recruitment strategy for health care professionals in the province. The announcement included 4 initiatives to attract health care providers: (1) the Provincial Recruitment Agency website www.healthcareersinsask.ca; (2) the Saskatchewan Relocation Program; (3) the Saskatchewan Rural, Northern and Hard-to-Recruit Program; and (4) the expansion of the clinical placement capacity.
- **Saskatchewan** Health Department has set the goal of recruiting 600 new health employees to fill vacancies over the next 2 years; 400 nurses and 200 other healthcare professionals. Rosalee Longmoore said in a statement to the media “the 400 new nurses to fill vacancies are very much needed in this province. However, we have to wonder if it is enough. Saskatchewan Health predicts that in less than 4 years we will lose one-third of our workforce to retirement, which would mean approximately 2000 RNs/RPNs retiring by 2010.”

“Retention, retention, retention. The Saskatchewan government will need to dedicate a substantial amount of funding in order to retain the nurses we currently have, those that are entering the profession in Saskatchewan, and those relocating from other provinces,” stated Longmoore. “The Return-for-Service allowances and Relocation Grants are incentives to relocate, but where are the incentives to stay? We need to look at ways to keep the RNs/RPNs in the province.”

During his announcement Minister Taylor indicated that the Provincial Nursing Committee will be presenting their recommendations for a health care professional retention strategy to the Minister by the end of November.

- **November 2nd** – SUN presents the Provincial Nursing Committee with a brief outlining the crisis situations in Saskatchewan’s Emergency Departments.

Looking ahead....

Over the next few months, SUN will continue to be committed to seeking opportunities to work with stakeholders regionally, provincially, and federally to develop a comprehensive retention and recruitment strategy for RNs and RPNs.