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Faculty of Nursing  
University of Toronto  
155 College Street  
Suite 215  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
M5S 3H4  
Tel: (416) 978-1966  
Fax: (416) 946-7142

Faculty of Health Sciences  
McMaster University  
Michael G. DeGroote Centre  
for Learning and Discovery,  
MDCL 3500  
1200 Main St. W.  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
L8N 3Z5  
Tel: (905) 525-9140 x22581  
Fax: (905) 522-5493



<http://www.nhsru.com>



This research has been generously  
funded, by a grant from the  
Government of Ontario. The views  
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## Nursing Health Services Research Unit McMaster University • University of Toronto *Home Health Nurses in Ontario Fact Sheet*

In 2004, home care nursing in Ontario had looming problems. Although the number of nurses employed in home care and visiting nursing had increased steadily between 1993 and 1998, the home care sector lost 27% of its nursing workforce between 1998 and 2004. Fewer nurses in this sector were working full time in 2004 compared to 1993; although this information predates the Ontario government nursing strategy, rolled out in 2004, to raise nursing employment by 8,000 positions by 2007/08. With fewer jobs, there were few new hires. Consequently, the proportion of nurses under 44 years old dropped from about 60% in 1993 to approximately 45% in 2004. The reducing trend in number of positions coincided with Community Care Access Centres' (CCACs) introduction of a competitive bidding process for contracting with home visiting agencies. This sector is once again in flux, with the implementation of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and debate about whether existing caps on services will be maintained.

Although the number of nurses employed in home care and visiting nursing had increased steadily between 1993 and 1998, changes led to a sharp and steady 27% decrease between 1998 and 2004<sup>1</sup> (Table 1). Possibly to reduce labour costs, the data revealed that fewer nurses in the home care sector were working full time (-6.8%) or casual (-5.2%) in 2004 compared to 1993; an increased proportion was working part-time. There was a 4.4% decrease in the proportion of Registered Nurses (RNs) employed in home care, and an 11.9% increase of Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs).

With fewer jobs, there were few new hires. Consequently, the proportion of younger nurses aged 18 - 34 and 35 - 44 dropped from about 60% of nurses in 1993 to 45% in 2004, while the proportion of nurses in the 55-65 years age group increased steadily (+11.4%). Similar to the overall Ontario nursing workforce trend, the median age cohort moved from 35-44 years in 1993, to 45-54 years in 2004.

The trend of reduced nursing positions coincided with the introduction of a competitive bidding process required by CCACs for contracting with home visiting agencies. This led to considerable instability in the sector<sup>2</sup>. Our data suggests that most of the growth in the community sector since 1998 was due to the increased numbers of nurses working as case managers for the newly established CCACs and in community mental health programs [which replaced programs formerly based in psychiatric hospitals], as opposed to nurses delivering care in homes. To the extent that home care and visiting nurses working in the old home care programs actually were doing case management rather than hands on care, the reduction in care delivery may be over-estimated. Nonetheless, the findings from the data are consistent with the sense within the sector that fewer nurses were delivering less care in homes, even as demand increased due to hospitals downsizing and reducing length of stay.

Home Health Nursing is defined as "a specialized area of nursing practice in which the nurse provides care in the client's home, school or workplace... [They] integrate health promotion, teaching and counseling within their clinical care activities. The goal of care is to initiate, manage and evaluate the resources needed to promote the client's optimal level of well-being and function."<sup>3</sup> This sector employs a variety of professionals, including nurses (RNs and RPNs), physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and unregulated providers. Recent reports demonstrate that home health care in Ontario and throughout Canada, has the potential to improve the efficiency of acute and chronic care.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> There is no requirement that provinces insure home nursing services, although many choose to do so on, at least a limited basis. Ontario currently funds a range of home care services, primarily for those with acute care needs, through a series of geographically-based, CCACs. Other home care services may be paid for by private insurance, workers compensation, or out-of-pocket. At present, to receive public

financing, agencies must compete for contracts via a managed competition process administered by CCACs<sup>8</sup>. Recent reviews have noted that the competitive bidding process has resulted in reduced wages and decreased benefits for the employees of these agencies<sup>9</sup>. This sector is once again in flux, particularly with the implementation of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and debate about whether existing caps on services will be maintained<sup>10</sup>.

### About the findings

*The Database:* The yearly registration data provided by CNO for 1993 to 2004 inclusive was analyzed. Although considerable efforts were made to clean the data, the precise designation of employment sub-sectors changed slightly over this time period. CNO used the designation "Home care/visiting care agency" for years 1993-1997, changed this to "Community Home Care Agency" for years 1998-2003, and to "Visiting Nursing Agency" in 2004. Note that the definition of 'home' also can vary; these nurses may also be providing services in retirement homes.

Because the current database only has information until 2004, this analysis predates the Ontario government nursing strategy, rolled out in 2004, to raise nursing employment by 8,000 positions by 2007/08. To the extent that the issues noted above are being addressed, the disquieting trends noted in this report may begin to be reversed. The home care sector achieved and exceeded their first year target for increasing the percentage of full-time RN positions in this 4 year initiative.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1: Characteristics of nurses working in the Visiting and Home Care nursing sub-sector (1993-2004)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>Total</b>	6455	6658	7257	7952	8390	8436	7552	7344	6866	5589	5230	4715
<b>FT, PT &amp; Casual Employment</b>												
<b>% FT</b>	45.2	45.1	46.0	44.5	41.3	41.7	37.0	40.3	42.3	40.0	37.6	38.4
<b>% PT</b>	27.9	27.0	27.8	28.4	28.2	29.8	32.3	34.0	34.0	35.9	34.1	32.3
<b>% Casual</b>	23.4	25.1	24.2	25.8	27.4	27.5	30.4	25.3	22.6	19.8	15.3	18.2
<b>Age</b>												
<b>% 18-34</b>	19.9	20.9	22.3	23.5	24.2	24.0	26.0	24.4	22.9	20.9	18.9	18.7
<b>% 35-44</b>	39.9	37.6	35.8	34.3	31.6	30.5	28.3	26.8	26.3	27.6	26.1	26.4
<b>% 45-54</b>	30.9	32.5	32.7	32.3	33.7	34.7	34.1	35.6	35.8	35.0	35.5	34.2
<b>% 55-64</b>	9.3	9.0	9.3	9.9	10.6	10.9	11.6	13.2	15.0	16.5	19.5	20.7
<b>Registration Category</b>												
<b>% RNs in Home care*</b>	82.6	80.0	78.7	79.1	79.6	78.9	75.4	74.2	72.1	71.7	70.9	70.7
<b>% RPNs in Home care</b>	17.4	20.0	21.3	20.9	20.4	21.1	24.6	25.8	27.9	28.3	29.1	29.3

\*In comparison to a relatively stable 77% or higher of RNs of all active nurses in the Ontario workforce.

Source: College of Nurses of Ontario data base

Prepared by M. Alameddine, PhD (C), J. Underwood, RN, MBA, A. Baumann, RN PhD, R. Deber, PhD, & A. Laporte, PhD. November, 2005 References supplied upon request.

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