

Adding More Seats in university nursing programs is no solution to the “crisis in nursing staffing”:

In his article in the Telegraph Journal on Friday, October 18, 2019, Michael Robinson reveals that prior to the budget cuts in the university nursing faculties, the UNB had pitched the province with an idea it believed would solve the nursing shortage crisis. He examined a flurry of attempts by the UNB administration to convince government that the solution to the nursing staffing crisis was to add a large investment to expanding faculty and class size in the RN programs at UNB.

In the exchanges of emails, it was revealed that the university proposed major expansion in enrollment levels with a cost estimate of \$14,000 per student as the solution to graduating more nurses qualified to write the registration examinations. This proposal was to take the number of seats from 488 to 800 by 2025/26 adding significant increase in budget in addition to what had been approved in 2005/6 for the expansion of class size.

Meanwhile, according to subsequent reports, government had learned that the increases approved in 2005/6 had not resulted in the agreed-upon increases in class size. So to the outside observer, it looks like the first investment failed to yield results and the university was looking for an increased investment to accomplish what the first investment was intended to do!

Government was wise in not responding to this offer, frankly, for it represents no solution to the real issues in staffing of hospitals and other health facilities at all. And if the earlier targeted investments failed to yield the intended results, why would one think that investing more millions of tax dollars would have a different result.

Increasing class size is critical but to what level and based on what evidence? In short, taken as a stand-alone strategy, this would be poor public policy.

The issues of nursing staffing go well beyond the numbers of nurses being graduated from universities; that is the easy part, if not the most costly. Other issues must be identified, analyzed, with action taken to resolve them. Many of these issues were identified in a commentary in August responding to the government’s release of its Nursing Resource Strategy in July 2019.

Responsible executives must start with a true assessment of the effective deployment of those valuable RN skills. Do the highly trained professional RNs spend significant portions of time in non-professional activity? Years ago, at the time regionalization of hospitals, a consultant study showed that only \$0.13 of every dollar spent by hospitals went to direct care; much of the balance, in addition to materials, laundry and such, was what was referred to as “waiting”.... for a lab test, for delivery of goods, for a room to be cleaned and so on.

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