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University Degree: A Requirement for Canadian Nurses by the Year 2000

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The directors of the Canadian Nurses' Association (CNA) have unanimously endorsed the concept of university preparation as the minimum requirement for nurses entering the profession by the year 2000. A task force has been set up by CNA to develop strategies so that the goal for the year 2000 can be reached. At the provincial level, seven provinces to date have voted to support the national association's position and the remaining three provinces are currently studying the feasibility of such a change.

The expanding role of the nurse in the health care delivery system has created the need to prepare a liberally educated person to function as a professional nurse in a variety of nursing roles and health care settings. University nursing education is designed to prepare graduates for: caregiving which is the major task of nursing both in the hospital and in community health agencies; for management and leadership in head nurse and supervisory positions; for health promotion as practiced in schools, homes and in clinics; for teaching and counselling which is inherent in almost every patient care situation; and in health and illness screening, a recently acquired and complex nursing responsibility (Kramer, 1981).

University Nursing Education in Canada

The beginnings of university nursing education in Canada were influenced sub-

stantially by the World Wars because the devastation of disease led to public demands for health services to prevent illness and promote health. After World War I, the Canadian Red Cross Society provided grants to six universities to stimulate the development of programmes to prepare public health nurses. In 1932, *A Survey of Nursing Education in Canada*, published by CNA, recommended that schools of nursing be incorporated into the general education system and that they be subsidized by government funds (Weir, 1932). The first undergraduate degree course in nursing was established at University of Toronto in 1933. In 1983, there are 28 university schools of nursing in Canada in 9 provinces.

Recent Trends

Over the past thirty years, the focus of nursing has changed from a traditional task-oriented intuitive practice to one which is research based and which applies the scientific method of inquiry. This changing focus is reflected in the increase in the number of graduates from university programmes over the past ten years (Table 1).

Today's nurse must be highly skilled in using an objective, analytical problem-solving approach to care. The basis for the development of this skill is a sound educational preparation in the liberal arts, humanities and

Table 1
Registered Nurses in Canada by Level
of Education in Nursing*

Year	Total Number	Diploma		Baccalaureate	
		Number	%	Number	%
1970	139,075	130,906	94.1	7,656	5.5
1980	203,654	174,007	85.4	18,086	8.9

*Adapted from Table 6, CNA, 1983.

sciences, a preparation which will only be found in a university programme. This problem-solving approach to nursing practice is currently referred to as the "nursing process". The 1970's have emphasized the "nursing diagnostic" aspect of that process evident in the work of Jones (1981) and Gottlieb (1981) who have developed a nursing diagnostic classification system.

Major developments in biomedical engineering such as artificial organ systems and sophisticated diagnostic equipment necessitate a stronger scientific educational background for nurses. Computers, which are already being widely used in the health care system are beginning to make an appearance in nursing practice. The use of a computer enables nurses to develop a data bank of patient profiles to assist them in providing effective individualized patient care.

Another recent trend in nursing is the development of clinical nursing specialties in such areas as community health, gerontological, occupational health, maternal-infant, psychiatric cardiovascular, rehabilitative and chronic care nursing. Preparation for these specialties at the post diploma, baccalaureate and master's degree level is well-established and rapidly expanding.

Health professionals, including nurses, frequently encounter difficult ethical decisions related to care of their patients as a result of advances in medical technology. One such example is the Karen Quinlan case where the decision was made to discontinue the use of life supporting equipment. Developing ethical discretion and logical reasoning to deal with such dilemmas can only be facilitated through a liberal arts background under the guidance of teachers with expertise in philosophy. It is not realistic to expect any health professional to be highly skilled in applying ethical frameworks to all possible situations one may

encounter, but being aware of both resources and logical approaches to the problem may result in better decision making.

During the sixties and seventies, nursing has emphasized conceptual frameworks, models and theories to guide nursing practice. Educational preparation in nursing research is becoming a fundamental requirement for all nurses to ensure that their care includes knowledge on such topics as: control of pain, health education, helping patients to cope with stress, supporting dying patients and their families and decreasing the adverse effects of living in institutions. Nursing research is essential for the future growth of knowledge to guide nursing practice, education and administration. The Canadian Nurses Association has accepted this need for the development of nursing research in Canada and has initiated a 5.2 million dollar proposal aimed at establishing at least one Ph.D. program in nursing in Canada.

Nursing Education in the United States

In the United States, similar changes in nursing education are underway. The American Nurses' Association has resolved that by 1985, the minimum preparation for entry into professional nursing practice be a university degree (American Nurses' Association, 1980). A second category of nurses, called technical nurses, will be graduated of community or junior college and will function within established nursing protocols under the direction of professional nurses. At this time, the Canadian Nurses' Association has not made any provision in its proposal for the creation of a separate category of technical nurse. That is to say, all nurses will be prepared at the university level by 2000: The committee charged with implementing the proposed changes in nursing education will consider what mechanisms will be necessary to protect the status of nurses who graduate from diploma programmes before the target date. Presently, there are several Canadian universities which offer programmes leading to a nursing degree for graduates of these diploma programmes.

The Year 2000

Advances in the health sciences require that nursing students acquire a scientific basis for nursing. Current basic nursing education does not permit the maturation required for the scientific, liberal and humanistic base needed to meet health care demands today.

While the precise terms of the university program of the year 2000 have not been detailed, the following features serve as guidelines to future programming:

1. A solid basis in: physical, biological and social sciences; nursing, including nursing research; and ethics.
2. Emphasis on critical thinking skills related to problem solving, ethical decision-making, clinical practice evaluation; and application of nursing research to practice.
3. Emphasis on the nursing of groups in schools, homes, and workplaces as well as nursing of individuals and families in hospitals.
4. Emphasis upon "self-care" and working with other professional and lay groups.
5. Knowledge of health care policy dynamics (Canadian Nurses' Association, 1982).

It is clear that the practice of nursing is changing dramatically. By the year 2000, nurses can expect to perform more complex technical skills and to take more responsibility for independent assessment and treatment decisions in and outside of hospitals. Students choosing a career in nursing today will be subject to these changes and face an important decision when they choose between diploma and university nursing education.

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