

*Editorial***“BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED”
(AUTHOR UNKNOWN)**

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The title of this editorial is taken from a plaque that hangs in the office of one of the site manager’s within the health region in which I live. When I saw this quotation I immediately thought how well it suits the group of nurses I have had the opportunity to spend time with over the past several months.

While gathering data for a rural research project, I have been given access to one of the most knowledgeable and hard working group of nurses in my health region. Those I have spoken with cover all facets of the rural health care industry i.e. acute care, long-term care, homecare, and public health. I have been made welcome in their work places, at their staff meetings, over lunches, and in their homes. The overwhelming response from these nurses is that they love what they do and they wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.

I find this interesting, in light of the fact that recruitment and retention of rural nurses, continues to be a major issue not only in Canada but also worldwide. Most of the nurses that I spoke with had 20 or more years of rural nursing experience and several are approaching retirement status. Therein lies the problem. How do we make rural nursing an attractive career choice for past and future nursing graduates?

Past studies have demonstrated that monetary incentives alone only work as a short-term device to attract staff (Aiken et al., 2001). Moreover, other studies have shown most nurses who live and work in rural health care are returning to their place of origin or marrying into the community (Bushy, 2000). In other words, rarely does a nurse go to a rural area for anything but personal reasons. This of course is a double-edged sword. Many rural nurses have come to an area and stayed there for much of their career resulting in a minimal turn over of staff and no need to recruit. On the other hand, many young nurses from these areas had to leave so that they could pursue a nursing career. Consequently their lives took a different path and they were lost to rural health care. With the present “greying” of the nursing population however, there is a desperate need to rectify this recruitment problem.

Following the lead from other countries, some rural health regions in Canada have created scholarship programs that pay for the nursing student’s education, providing the student promises to return to the area to practice for a period following graduation. In addition, because various studies have shown that students who are exposed to rural practica during their education will be more likely to make rural a career choice following graduation (Kenny & Duckett, 2003), some rural areas are offering to pay students expenses if they are willing to spend a practicum experience in the area. Still other sites are offering full-time summer employment as to students as a recruitment approach. Hopefully with these types of recruitment initiatives, more and more recent nursing graduates will be drawn back to their communities and continue to “bloom where they are planted”.

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