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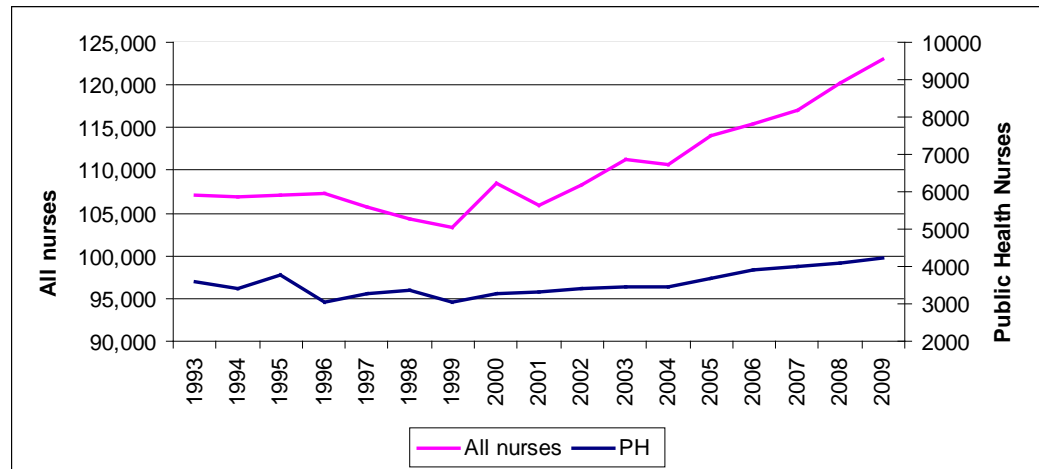
Nurses in Public Health in Ontario

The total number of nurses employed in public health in Ontario has been remarkably stable over the past decade. This fact sheet analyzes the yearly registration data provided by the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) for 1993 to 2009 to clarify the supply trends as well as the age, and registration profile of nurses who work in public health. It updates the 2007 fact sheet on Nurses in Public Health in Ontario.¹

Although 4,216 nurses reported in their 2009 CNO registration that they were working in public health², the Public Health Division of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) estimated 2,717 full-time equivalent (FTE) nurses working in public health in the same year³. This report relies on the CNO registration data which includes all nurses that self report they work in Public Health; this may be on a full-time, part time or casual basis².

The nurses working in Public Health in 2009 represented 3.4 % (4,216/123,091) of all nurses employed in Ontario². The lack of Public Health sector growth in the 1990's led to few new hires and the proportion of nurses aged 18-34 dropped from 28.6% in 1993 to 17.3% in 1999. However the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, 100% funded by the provincial Ministry of Children and Youth Services was introduced into the public health system in 1997. By 2002, 1,033 nurses were working in the program, accounting for 33% of the total public health nursing complement, which has contributed to sustaining a fairly constant number of nurses in public health¹. Table 1 shows the total number of nurses working in this sector from 1993 to 2009. Note, however, that growth in the overall nursing workforce has been higher, which makes nurses in Public Health a smaller proportion of the nursing work force (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Number of Nurses Working in Public Health, compared to the overall nursing workforce in Ontario 1993-2009



Nurses who work in public health qualify in one of the following categories:

- Registered Nurses (RNs) - Public Health Nurses (PHNs) are registered with the CNO and, according to provincial legislation, are required to have public health nursing education from a degree granting institution in Canada or at a degree granting institution outside Canada that is accepted as an equivalency in Canada⁴. (RNs without university preparation are not eligible to use the title PHN but can be assigned to more circumscribed roles within public health, e.g., immunization programs).
- Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) - are known as Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in other provinces, may be assigned to screening or immunization services.
- Nurse practitioners - are registered as RN (Extended class [EC]) and are RNs with advanced training.

The public health sector differs from others (e.g., acute care and long-term care) by having a very high proportion of RNs. As Table 1 demonstrates, almost all nurses working in public health nurses are RNs, with only 3.1% who were RPNs in 2009. This reflects the complexity and autonomy of public health nursing work and the legislated requirements noted above.

Table 1 Characteristics of Nurses Working in Public Health by Age and Registration Category, 1993-2009

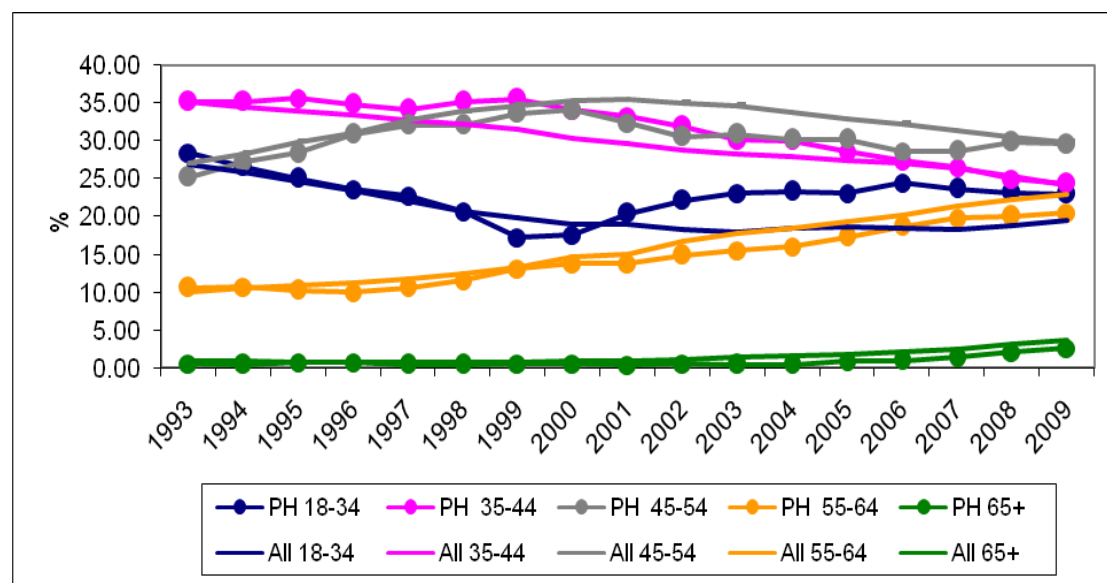
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total*	3570	3420	3766	3048	3276	3341	3060	3251	3330	3412	3435	3443	3695	3919	4014	4110	4216
Age																	
% 18-34	28.6	26.7	25.2	23.8	22.8	20.8	17.3	17.7	20.5	22.2	23.2	23.4	23.3	24.7	24.0	23.6	23.6
% 35-44	35.3	35.3	35.9	35.1	34.3	35.4	35.7	34.3	33.3	32.1	30.2	30.2	28.8	27.7	26.9	25.5	25.0
% 45-54	25.4	27.3	28.6	31.1	32.2	32.2	33.8	34.2	32.4	30.7	31.0	30.4	30.5	28.8	29.0	30.5	30.4
% 55-64	10.7	10.7	10.3	10.0	10.7	11.6	13.2	13.8	13.8	15.0	15.6	16.0	17.4	18.8	20.1	20.4	21.0
Registration Category of Nurses Working in Public Health																	
% RNs*	91.2	90.2	88.6	90.2	89.6	89.7	90.8	92.5	93.7	94.8	95.6	95.8	96.0	96.1	95.9	95.7	95.9
% RNs EC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.8	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0
% RPNs	8.8	9.8	11.4	9.8	10.4	10.3	8.2	6.6	5.5	4.4	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1

Source: College of Nurses of Ontario (2009), Membership Statistics Report.

*Compares to a relatively stable 77% or higher of RNs of all active nurses in the workforce².

On average, the more recent influx (in part associated with the Healthy Babies Healthy Children associated hiring) has meant that the public health nursing workforce is now slightly younger than the overall Ontario nursing workforce (see Figure 2). For example, in 2009 23% of the 4,216 nurses working in public health were 34 years or younger, compared to 19% of all Ontario nurses in the same age group². The proportion of nurses in public health aged 55-64 increased steadily from 1996 to 21 % in 2009 which was less than the 23% that was seen in the total population of RNs in this age group in Ontario. The average age of RNs employed in public health in 2009 was Ontario 44.6 years compared to 46.3 years for all RNs registered in Ontario².

Figure 2 Age distribution of nurses working in Public Health compared to all nurses working in Ontario



Background

A variety of professionals are employed in the public health sector, including nurses, physicians, inspectors, epidemiologists, nutritionists and health promotion specialists. It is estimated that nurses represent more than half of all professionals working in public health in Ontario.³ Public health nurses (PHNs) may practice in homes, schools, shelters, clinics, community agencies or on the street. They may collaborate with members of the community in designing and implementing various strategies (e.g., community development, health promotion and disease prevention). They link health and illness experiences of individuals, families and communities to population health promotion practices, focussing on promoting, protecting and preserving the health of populations.⁵

Updated April, 2010 by J. Underwood, A. Baumann, R. Deber, and A. Dragan.

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References

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- ² College of Nurses of Ontario (2009). *Membership Statistics Report*. <http://www.cno.org/about/stats/reports.htm>
- ³ Public Health Division (2009). *Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Initial Report on Public Health*. Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario.
- ⁴ Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act section 71(3)
- ⁵Community Health Nurses of Canada (2008). *Canadian Community Health Nursing Standards of Practice*. author.