

An Opportunity to Impact the Front Lines: Implementation of the Nurse Collegian III Position in the Western Zone

Summer 2023

Background

Health-care organizations worldwide have been facing health human resources shortages. Across Canada, nursing positions have remained a focus and at the end of 2022 nearly one quarter of positions were vacant.

The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing recognizes the value that student nurses can bring to the workplace as unregulated care providers (UCPs). It is acknowledged, "when done right, hospitals gain much-needed nursing support, patients gain the care of better prepared nursing students, and the students gain foundational caring skills and a better understanding of the health service environment."

Paid nursing student work experiences have been recognized as a potential tool in the recruitment of future RNs.

Nursing students, in the UCP role, should be supported to safely maximize their current academic level of competency.



Project Overview

Historically, the Western Zone of NL Health Services offered Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) student employment as Nurse Collegian I positions, with a focus on meeting personal care needs of residents in long-term care. In alignment with our strategic priority of Our People, NL Health Services implemented the Nurse Collegian III (NC III) in the Western Zone in 2023. The purpose of the position is to maximize the scope of third-year nursing students, address gaps in health care and potentially have greater positive impacts on acute care areas.

To be employed, the NC III is required to be a current student who had successfully completed year three of a BScN Program, including preceptorship, from an approved school of nursing.

Students, in the NC III paid positions, can work to their BScN year three competency level under the supervision of an assigned registered nurse mentor. Detailed position guidelines were developed and provided to NC IIIs and nurse mentors in this unregulated role.

Goals

The goals of the NC III positions were to:

- Provide additional patient care resources on inpatient units within the Western Zone
- Expand student learning and further develop nursing skills
- Recruit nursing students as future registered nurses

Activities

NL Health Services hired 15 NC IIIs throughout the Western Zone in temporary full-time positions in the summer of 2023. Orientation was provided to NC IIIs, their mentors and leadership.

Focus groups were held with NC IIIs, nurse mentors, and unit leaders to evaluate the program.

Project Outcomes

Feedback from NC IIIs	Feedback from Nurse Mentors	Feedback from Unit Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on personal and professional development • Felt like they had an ability to "make a difference" and positively impact patient care • Felt like they were still viewed as a students and not employees • Saw themselves staying and working as future RNs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciated the "extra set of hands" • Positions lightened workload for everyone involved • Felt care was enhanced with "extra TLC, and while short staffed, it didn't feel that way" • Opportunity to contribute to skill development and recruitment of future colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on patient care, staffing/workload and professional socialization of future RNs • Challenges related to human resource gaps, budget for positions, inconsistent knowledge on program and role



“ I was like, yeah, I found my place like, this is my spot. This is what I was meant to be doing... I would heavily consider staying here to work here longer than I ever was planning to. ”

- NC III participant

“ It was great having that extra person ... who... [is] almost trained as a registered nurse. ”

- Nurse leader participant

Opportunities Ahead

The NC III pilot project was a success, as evidenced by feedback from NC IIIs, nurse mentors, and unit leaders. Feedback included improvements to patient care, unit workload, NC III skill development, and recruitment and retention of future RNs.

Changes were implemented to enhance the 2023 program, and it was offered again in 2024. NL Health Services is moving forward to implement learnings from this evaluation with other zones to support continuous improvement of NC III positions provincially.

