Identifying Issues of Student Access and Student Success for Practical Nursing Diploma to Bachelor of Science Nursing

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Background and Introduction

- Two categories of nurses in Ontario – **RPN, RN** – for which educational requirements have changed and evolved over time
  - In 1982, CNA stated that **by 2000**, the *minimum entrance to practice requirement* would be a baccalaureate degree
  - Prior to and **up until 2004** – 3 year college diploma or 4 year baccalaureate degree – graduates write the registration exam to become an RN
  - **Universities adapted**, offered **post-RN degree programs** to meet entry to practice requirement
  - To meet workplace demand, Province of Ontario funded **collaborative partnership programs**, most in place **by 2001** (and compressed programs since evolved)
Background and Introduction

• Also significant changes in educational programming for RPNs over time

  • RPN programs replaced Nursing Assistant programs in 1993

  • In 2001, MTCU published revised *Practical Nursing Program Standards*

  • Since 2002, Ontario Colleges have offered 4 or 5 semester PN diploma programs

  • The *Regulated Health Professions Acts* (1991) authorizes both RNs and RPNs to perform the same three controlled acts
Initial Purpose

To develop a common pathway for graduates of the Practical Nursing diploma programs to the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree programs.

- Identify common elements of existing bridge programs offered by universities
- Identify learning content and outcomes required for students to enter a degree nursing program at a targeted entry point
- Compare proposed curriculum to the learning outcomes in the new provincial Practical Nursing Program Standard and develop curriculum required for the bridge program
Challenges Encountered

The lack of formal approval for the new provincial *Practical Nursing Program Standard*
- Expected early 2012, not yet formally approved

The lack of existing differences in the stated learning outcomes for PN diploma and BScN baccalaureate degree programs
- Differences are in depth not breadth of material
- Changes in scopes of practice over time

The lack of common sequencing of courses between university degree programs
- CASN encourages programs to adopt and embrace differing philosophical perspectives
The Project Re-Defined

• Examine ways to **enhance access to existing PN to BScN pathways while encouraging further development** of the same

• Find ways to **further enhance cooperation and understanding** between the province’s colleges and universities in providing access to BScN education

• **Elevate the research agenda** to create an **evidence-based approach** for current and future program development and modification

• Find ways to **share resources** between institutions providing bridges/credit transfer pathways
Current Status: PN to BScN Programming

- Currently 9 (soon to be 10) bridge/credit transfer pathways involving 6 universities and 10 colleges in the province.

- One university has currently partnered with 73 health care organizations to offer RPN employees access to BScN degrees through a distance platform.

- PN diploma to BScN degree bridge/credit transfer pathways are increasingly viewed as “mainstream” educational opportunities rather than “optional”, “back door”, “side door” or “alternate entry” programs.
**Current Status: PN to BScN Programming**

- The **demand** for PN to BScN bridge/credit transfer pathways has been **on the rise over the last decade** (COUPN, 2011)

- A **2012 survey of PN graduates from one college** revealed:
  - **67%** consider bridge programming after RPN
  - **72%** would **apply within 0-2 years** of graduation
  - **45%** prefer **full-time**, **55%** prefer **part-time** studies
  - **58%** prefer a combined **classroom/on-line** program
  - **50%** **prefer not to move** from current geographic area to go to school
Current Status: PN to BScN Programming

- PN to BScN bridge/credit transfer pathway programming is popular

- Less well known is the fact that attrition rates from such programs are very high
  - only anecdotal information available to work with to try and understand why

- The “go forward innovation imperative” is to provide access to programming that also seeks to support students to succeed and achieve
Recommendations

Enhanced Access

1. Current PN to BScN offerings (i.e., 9-10) need to be added to the ONCAT website.

2. ONCAT should consider adding a visual map which depicts existing bridge/credit transfer pathways.
Recommendations

Enhanced Access

3. There are a number of websites which contain information related to PN to BScN degree offerings
   • Need to clarify these roles
   • Identify one as a central repository for bridge/credit transfer pathways

4. The development of additional PN to BScN bridge/credit transfer pathways is encouraged.

5. Within the province, there is a need to create clarity with respect to the various college-to-university program linkages that have evolved over time (e.g., collaborative programming vs bridge/credit transfer pathways).
Recommendations

*Enhanced Cooperation and Understanding Between Provincial Institutions*

6. Host a **province-wide symposium** on PN diploma to BScN degree programming in the near future.
   - Promote **inter-institutional cooperation** between the colleges and universities
   - **Raise the visibility** of bridge/credit transfer pathways
   - **Share the learning** of those that are leaders with others
   - Move all institutions toward **an evidence-based approach** for current and future program development and modification.
Recommendations

**Elevating the Research Agenda to Create an Evidence-Based Approach for Current and Future Program Development and Modification**

7. There is a need to ensure via **research** that the educational programming is of sufficient **quality** to ensure that its graduates are capable of providing **safe**, **competent**, and **ethical care**.
Recommendations

Elevating the Research Agenda to Create an Evidence-Based Approach for Current and Future Program Development and Modification

8. There is an ongoing need to ask critical questions, collect data, analyze, reflect, and modify programs with respect to:
   • Minimum allowable credit transfer, entrance requirements, and student motivation
   • Providing programming on a part-time vs full-time basis
   • Providing programming in on-line, blended or distributed formats
Recommendations

Elevating the Research Agenda to Create an Evidence-Based Approach for Current and Future Program Development and Modification

8. There is an ongoing need to ask critical questions, collect data, analyze, reflect, and modify programs with respect to:
   • Need for clinical and/or simulation programming
   • Need for additional Francophone programming
   • The extent to which existing bridges/credit transfer pathways allow for/provide access for RPNs trained in other provinces or countries
Recommendations

_Elevating the Research Agenda to Create an Evidence-Based Approach for Current and Future Program Development and Modification_

9. ONCAT should **invest funds to support research** aimed at understanding the questions outlined in #8 as well as:
   - Value of **traditional/existing access criteria** (e.g., GPA) vs **motivation or other factors** and how they relate to **student success** (e.g., RN registration)
   - Understanding the **demographic diversity** (e.g., mature students, work and family demands, current employment status) and **associated needs** of students (e.g., limited geographic mobility)
Recommendations

_Elevating the Research Agenda to Create an Evidence-Based Approach for Current and Future Program Development and Modification_

9. ONCAT should **invest funds in support research** aimed at understanding the questions outlined in Recommendation #8 as well as:
   - What role might **PLAR** play in accessing eligibility or suitability for entry into bridge/curriculum transfer pathways
   - The **future demand for BScN credentialing** and more broadly, **what will the nurse of the future look like?**
Recommendations

Sharing Institutional Resources

10. **Efficiencies** may be found in the **sharing of resources** between those offering bridge/credit transfer pathways (e.g., offering simulation laboratories or a common on-line transition course).

11. The **focus** of the **transition course** would be **procedural** (e.g., writing, computer literacy, research, presentational skills) rather than declarative in nature.
Summary and Future Directions

- A culture shift, one which supports collaboration between the colleges and universities is required.

- The shift has begun – the recommendations in this report reflect a spirit of cooperation and innovation – the value of which cannot be underestimated.

- Existing gap in PN to BScN education is not one of too few bridge/credit transfer pathways but rather the lack of understanding of the factors critical to student success.

- It is time to shift the focus from the quantity of learning experiences to the quality of learning experiences.