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Nurses and Physicians in Partnership: Shorter Wait Times for Canadians

Winnipeg, October 11, 2007 – The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is pleased to announce the release of a joint vision statement with the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) on the value of collaborative interprofessional care for Canadians. The document was released today at a media conference held as part of the CFPC’s annual Family Medicine Forum in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Kaaren Neufeld, president-elect of CNA, participated in the news conference and shared preliminary findings that show that when nurses work in partnership with family physicians and other health professionals, wait times are drastically decreased and access to health services improves.

“Teamwork strengthens family practice and creates synergies that benefit the patient, their families, the provider and the health system,” says Neufeld. “Nurses, doctors, pharmacists, social workers, dietitians and others have a long and rich history of working together in primary care settings. Our joint statement builds on that relationship and on evidence of its effectiveness.”

Programs that support the development of collaborative teams in primary care settings and optimize the skills of each health professional are being implemented across the country. One of these programs is supported by Primary Care at the Capital District Health Authority in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and after six months, it is already showing promising results in terms of reducing wait times and improving access to care.

“At this early stage, teams are already reporting an increase in the number of patients who are being seen, and timely access to care has shown considerable improvement,” states Patsy Smith, RN, project lead of the Nursing in Your Family Practice program in Halifax. “This has been accomplished while comprehensive chronic disease management, health promotion and disease prevention have been enhanced. The majority of practices involved in this program have also increased their ability to accept new patients.”

Collaboration among health professionals is one of four elements of improved health services for Canadians. Other elements include research into new technologies and innovations, implementation of electronic systems and adequate health human resources.

“A key strategy to achieving improved access to primary health care for patients in Canada will be enhanced access to collaborative care between family physicians and nurses as well as other health professionals,” says Dr. Tom Bailey, CFPC president. “To this end, the CFPC is very pleased to join with CNA in the development of the joint vision statement released today that challenges governments and key health-care stakeholders to support the resources needed to improve access to care.”

In a time of health-care reform, when service delivery models are shifting from the institution to the community, it is increasingly important that registered nurses and nurse practitioners work with family physicians in primary health care teams. “Nurses complement the work of family physicians and vice versa,” says Neufeld. “Each team member brings a unique set of skills, knowledge and expertise to patient care.”

CNA is the national professional voice of registered nurses in Canada. It is a federation of 11 provincial and territorial professional associations and regulatory authorities for registered nurses. CNA believes that the sustainability of a publicly funded, publicly administered, not-for-profit health system rests upon a vibrant nursing workforce.

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