

Nursing grads soar at Sunnybrook

By Nadia Norcia Radovini



Nursing grad Tess Mountain (right) cares for a trauma patient at Sunnybrook. Tess is one of many recent graduates participating in the Nursing Graduate Guarantee Initiative, which offers Ontario nursing graduates learning opportunities while securing them full-time employment.

New nurses are buzzing around Sunnybrook, as the hospital has undertaken the province's Nursing Graduate Guarantee Initiative, offering nursing graduates across Ontario exciting opportunities to learn and grow while securing them full time employment.

For nurse Tess Mountain, the initiative means she's currently working in her dream job: "This is the mecca of where I wanted to get to, the place I wanted to be." Currently working in the trauma and acute care areas at Sunnybrook, Tess graduated from Trent University with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) in the spring of 2007. "It's phenomenal. I certainly think it's because of the new grad initiatives. In addition, the support for new nursing graduates is so incredible here; especially because Sunnybrook is a teaching hospital, so everyone is so willing to explain things."

"Our goal is to recruit nurses, and to keep them," says Susan VanDeVelde-Coke, executive vice president Programs and Chief Health Professions & Nursing Executive at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. "The new grad initiative helps to ensure new nurses are comfortable working in their unit, with their colleagues, physicians, and allied health professionals. The program allows new graduates a substantial orientation period which research indicates is key in retaining new staff."

Sunnybrook hired 85 general nursing graduates, including both Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs). The hospital received

its first group in June, and an additional four groups over the summer in acute care, cardiac care, Holland Centre orthopaedics, perinatal & gynaecology, long term care and various other medical/surgical units.

"Sunnybrook offered the best opportunity for me through the initiative in regards to training," says Jen Smith, also a graduate working in the acute and trauma areas, with a BSN from the University of Windsor. "Sunnybrook is sending us to George Brown for a critical care training course in emergency nursing. We began in September for a few days a week, and received our certificates in November."

Many new nursing graduates prefer full-time jobs but until recently, found it difficult to find them in Ontario. The Initiative assists graduates in gaining full-time experience, easing the transition into the workforce, and helping to ensure nursing grads remain working in Ontario.

The implementation of the

Nursing Graduate Guarantee Initiative commenced in the spring of 2007. The Ministry created an on-line job portal that is a meeting place for employers and new Ontario nursing graduates (RNs and RPNs). These job opportunities are in the hospital, long-term care, home care, mental health, public health, and primary care sectors. The process requires new

graduates to register on the portal and they apply to jobs posted by employers. To date, over 2000 matches have been made through the HealthForceOntario Jobs portal.

The Ministry provides a six-month salary plus benefits for every graduate. The hospitals provide and fund orientation, which takes place for a minimum of three months and includes education in clinical

topics, intravenous skills, equipment training through simulation and assistance from nursing preceptors and mentors. For the first time, Sunnybrook standardized the orientation process so all nurses received the same education. Each hospital is also responsible to provide the nurses full-time employment somewhere within the hospital. After three months, if a full-time job is available and the nurse graduate is ready, they can go directly into a full-time job.

For both Tess and Jen, their applications went out in February/March, were called in for interviews and testing, and were hired in the spring. They began with orientation within a classroom environment, and were then brought on the floor and "buddied" to work alongside full-time nurses. "We worked with a lot of nurses, learning different techniques," says Jen. "It's great to know at the end of this program, we'll have that much more experience and are guaranteed full-time work in the hospital somewhere."

"We're excited about this program and we're grateful to the government for providing funding for it," adds Sue Coke. "We hope the Ministry will continue the program; it has been a wonderful opportunity to hire, mentor and welcome new graduates into the Sunnybrook community."

Nadia Norcia Radovini is a Communications Advisor at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

Toronto Grace creates a healthy workplace

By Stefani Venere

"We are all committed to providing a healthy and safe work environment. That is an organizational priority," says Maila Riddell, Employee Health Coordinator at The Salvation Army Toronto Grace Health Centre. Quality and retention literature clearly indicate that a happier and healthier workforce leads to better care, service and greater patient satisfaction. The Toronto Grace Healthy Workplace Committee promotes a holistic approach to health consciousness and wellness by focusing on topics such as stress management, health surveillance, nutrition and fitness.

Reducing one's stress is an important component in leading a physically and emotionally healthier life. Exercise can play an important role in stress management, so at the Grace,

weekly programs in stretching, stair climbing, walking and yoga promote fitness to help manage stress. Education plays another large role. Lunch and learn sessions focus on subjects such as positive thinking, emotional intelligence, taking initiative, developing assertiveness skills, and team building. An annual Wellness Fair brings spas, fitness clubs, massage and a host of health promotion/disease prevention agencies to staff and volunteers. In addition to their own human resources and employee health counseling services, the Grace supports staff with a third party Employee Assistance Program.

To better equip employees to also deal with the emotionally charged situations that can arise in hospitals, the Grace provides crisis prevention training to all clinical staff. These sessions help prepare staff to recognize

situations of anxiety or conflict and to apply special skills to diffuse situations and work toward a positive outcome. Providing this training to all staff creates a more confident and consistent approach to crisis prevention at the Grace.

All of these unique programs contribute to creating an appreciative, healthy and safe environment for staff. One indicator of its effectiveness is staff attendance. At the Grace last year, staff were absent an average of only 3.96 days – what they believe is the best attendance record of any hospital in Canada. This illustrates a culture of commitment, performance, and the benefits of maintaining a dynamic healthy workplace.

Stefani Venere is a Special Events and Public Relations Coordinator at Toronto Grace Health Centre.



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