



**Sault Star
Education Column**

Sault College Nursing - from the community to the community

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By Martha Irwin, Communications Officer

Sault Ste. Marie has a tradition of quality nursing education that extends back many decades. Before Sault College, nurses in the Sault were educated at the General Hospital and Plummer Memorial Hospital sites. In 1972 an independent Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology was created, providing a model that offered training independently off-site of the employer.

Sounds obvious today, but that was the beginning of a community college system that focussed on training for the workplace. Consequently, the Algoma School of Nursing moved to Sault College from the Plummer Hospital in 1973 and shortly after, the St. Mary's School of Nursing also amalgamated to the Algoma School of Nursing at Sault College. In a final formal connection to the college, the alumnae of the St. Mary's School of Nursing donated \$8,000 to the Sault College nursing program to assist future students through an annual scholarship award.

Today, Sault College offers a two-year practical nursing program and a four-year bachelor of science nursing program. The two-year practical nursing program attracts 60-80 students annually. Graduates are eligible to write the national practical nurse registration examination and upon successful completion, are entitled to apply to the College of Nurses of Ontario for registration as a practical nurse.

In 2000, Sault College, Cambrian College and Northern College, in partnership with Laurentian University, created the North Eastern Ontario Collaborative Nursing Program (NEOCNP) to develop the four year B.Sc. nursing (BScN) program. This was based on a recommendation from the College of Nurses of Ontario reflecting the increasing complexity of health care, and the resultant need for broader, higher-level competencies.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2005 the entry level to practice as a registered nurse became a bachelor of science in nursing. Community-based nursing also contributed to an increased demand for nurses. The first BScN students were enrolled in 2001 and graduated in 2005. Now, there are approximately 40 BScN graduates annually at Sault College. As part of their graduation requirements, all of these students complete placements in community based and hospital settings.

Being able to offer all four years of the BScN program in Sault Ste. Marie has been effective, because there is a need for nurses with an understanding of Northern communities. Graduates are granted a Laurentian University degree and are eligible to write the provincial registration exams to become a registered nurse with the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Most of the collaborative nursing programs require students to attend two years at a college campus and two years at the partnering university, says Marilyn King, chair of health sciences at Sault College. Having our students stay with us over four years allows us to work with our students through to their upper years, allowing for consistency in learning and expectations. We are a close knit community on campus.

Class sizes range from 45-60 students in lectures with most course delivery divided into smaller sections. Today's students also benefit from updated training facilities that include a state-of-the-art acute care medical/surgical and maternal/child clinical simulation lab. Nine clinical simulation mannequins ranging from mechanical to fully programmable are now housed in a medical/surgical adult lab, and a maternal/child lab. The labs build on the ten-bed ward that includes a functional nursing station and four-bed practice lab for use by practical nursing and BScN students beginning in their first year.

Working with a community advisory board, the department ensures accountability and relevancy within the programs. Sault College has a faculty complement that holds extensive nursing experience in areas including medical, surgical, critical care, community /public health, obstetrical, long term care, oncology, cardiology and case management, providing quality education and a high degree of success among graduates.

With more than 94 per cent of nursing graduates employed within six months of graduation, if not sooner, Sault College plays an important role in ensuring that local health-care providers have a steady stream of qualified nursing graduates.

For information about the nursing programs at Sault College, contact the registrar's office at (705) 759-6700, visit www.saultcollege.ca or send me an email at martha.irwin@saultcollege.ca.

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