Towards a Healthy Workplace for Health Care Workers

Friday, April 11, 2003 – A recent CPRN Health Network report for the Romanow Commission on health human resource planning pointed to a 180º shift, in less than a decade, in attitudes towards the number of doctors and nurses in the health care system.

Governments have swung from believing there was an over-supply to the conviction today that there is a shortage. The CPRN report saw that shift as evidence of the failure of current approaches to planning the future health care work force. It called for the creation of a national health human resources agency to integrate work force planning into overall health system design. The Romanow Commission adopted that recommendation.

Getting a handle on the human resource needs of the health care system is one important step towards reform. Equally important, is ensuring that health care institutions are able to attract the health care professionals they need in the years ahead. Their ability to compete for skilled workers in the tight labour market of the future will depend on the quality of their workplaces.

Just as there has been a failure of planning for human resource demands, there has also been a failure to develop strategies to improve the health care workplace. Shortages of health care professionals also reflect that reality.

In a recent presentation in Saskatchewan, Work Network Associate, Graham Lowe argues that attention to the work environment is critical to solving recruitment and retention challenges facing the health care sector.

In ***Identifying the Building Blocks of a Healthy Health Care Work Environment***, Lowe reviews the characteristics of a high quality workplace and its positive impact on employment relationships, morale, job satisfaction, productivity and commitment.

He situates the health care workplace in relation to that of other sectors, analyzes the origins of its current difficulties, and proposes a strategy for change.

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