# Improving the Health Care Workplace

**Friday, December 21, 2001 –** The Canadian Nurses Association predicts that, within the next ten years, Canada will experience a shortage of nurses approaching 60,000, almost 25% of the current nursing labour force. Whether this looming shortage is the result of deteriorating working conditions, as some argue, or a reflection of demographic realities, or both, it is one indicator of distress in the health sector.

In fact, in terms of a number of key indicators of job quality, health care workplaces rank near the bottom. So, the quality of workplaces in the health sector becomes a matter of primary importance to those who wish to attract and retain the requisite numbers of skilled health professionals today and in the future.

Health care workplaces are in many respects unlike any others in their complexity. They are highly unionized, characterized by adversarial industrial relations, by a diverse mix of unions and professional associations, and segmented along numerous occupational and functional lines.

What's more, the health care sector is under immense political and public pressure, while experiencing almost constant restructuring with consequent low morale, commitment, trust and staff shortages.

To top it all off, the sector's complexity is reflected in its complicated governance and unclear lines of accountability at all levels.

The challenge of turning this environment into one characterized by high quality workplaces is not for the faint of heart.

CPRN and its partners at Health Canada, the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation and the Change Foundation are currently involved in an effort to map out an appropriate path.

Recently, the Director of the Work Network, Graham Lowe, made a presentation in Edmonton to the Capital Health Authority conference on "Leaders in Learning - Creating a Workplace of Choice". In it, he describes the building blocks of a high-quality workplace and discusses their adaptability to the health care environment.

You can read or download a Powerpoint version of his comments by clicking here.

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