

We are

# Practical Nursing

Spring 2025

**WITH YOU  
EVERY STEP  
OF THE WAY**

**We RPN**

Registered Practical Nurses  
Association of Ontario



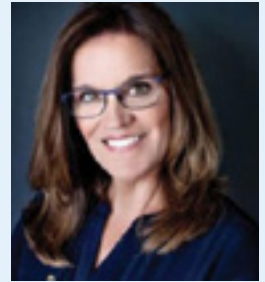
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Taking a Pause to Talk  
Menopause: Navigating the  
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# With You Every Step of the Way: Supporting RPNs at Every Stage



As we release our Spring Journal, I want to take a moment to reflect on this edition's theme: how WeRPN supports you at every stage of your nursing journey. Our commitment begins before you even enter the profession, providing resources and support for students, and continues throughout your career – whether you're exploring new opportunities, advancing in your role, or stepping into leadership. We are constantly adapting programs and creating new ways to serve and support you better.

We have a great journal prepared for you, with articles that reflect the many stages of nursing – from new grads to retirees – and how WeRPN is with you every step of the way. In *Feeling the Squeeze*, we examine the tension so many of us face – often in silence – balancing work and home life, especially in the middle of our careers when we find ourselves caring for both children and aging parents. We also take a dive into the topic of menopause and its impact on the nursing profession. Even though so many of us are experiencing it, there is little to no research, leaving many to navigate this major life transition without the information or support they need.

For those earlier in their careers, this edition also highlights some of the great resources available on our website to support nursing students preparing for their exams, as well as insights into the valuable relationship between mentors and mentees.

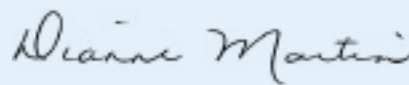
Over the years, I've often heard nursing described as a calling. While I understand the sentiment, I believe nursing is so much more than that. It's a profession – one that demands skill, knowledge, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. It's

not just something you're 'meant' to do; it's something you work hard to master every day. RPNs bring expertise, dedication, and innovation to patient care, and that deserves to be recognized and respected as a true profession.

As I begin to reflect on my own career and consider the next stage, I find myself looking back on the incredible journey we've been on together. Leading WeRPN has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. I've had the opportunity to witness the resilience, passion, and strength of RPNs across Ontario, and I've been honored to champion the critical role you play in our healthcare system. Your dedication continues to inspire me, and I have no doubt that the future of our profession is bright.

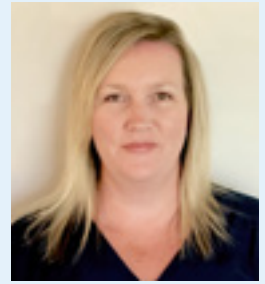
I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together, and I remain committed to standing alongside you – advocating for the recognition, respect, and support you deserve. Because our work is not done, nor will it be once the next stage of my career arrives.

That's why the importance of your involvement in so important for taking us forward.



**Dianne Martin, RPN**  
CEO, WeRPN

# President's Address: Spring 2025



As I settle into the role of President, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey that has led me here. It is a true honour to serve the dedicated and committed RPNs of Ontario who continue to shape the future of healthcare in so many ways. I am continually inspired by each of you – the exceptional care you provide in hospitals, long-term care, home care, and beyond. You are making a difference every single day.

I have learned throughout my career as an RPN that leadership opportunities within our profession is demonstrated in many forms, and that's what makes RPNs so exceptional. Witnessing the innovative ways in which we show up each day to advocate as leaders, highlights that each of our individual leadership journeys are unique but equal in the positive impact toward advancing and upholding our profession. Whether it's a formal role or informal guidance for a colleague, RPNs are all leaders – each in our own way.

For too long, we have discounted our worth. We've all heard someone say, "I'm just an RPN." But the truth is, each day, we lead in ways both big and small. We face challenges in our work, often without the recognition we deserve, and yet we continue to show up and make a difference. As health care leaders, we must take every opportunity to recognize ourselves, to be strong advocates for our profession, while highlighting the integral care we provide to the people of Ontario.

I want to encourage RPNs to take risks, explore new possibilities, be curious and ask questions.

In my role as President, I want to advocate for every RPN to recognize the leader within. We've seen great strides and are gaining momentum, with more RPNs stepping into leadership positions within their organizations, and it's my mission to ensure that we continue forging ahead. We need to keep seeking out opportunities and advocating for systemic change. I want to encourage RPNs to take risks, explore new possibilities, be curious and ask questions. Be confident in knowing that your contributions matter and you belong at the table. There are so many opportunities for growth – growth we haven't even begun to tap into – and that's an exciting prospect.

The Spring Journal focuses on the many phases and stages of the nursing profession and captures the challenges and triumphs that define our journey. We are a group of professionals who are constantly evolving, whether in our daily work, through mentorship and even further education. The articles and resources in this issue provide insights and practical advice to support RPNs at every career stage.

The article Mid-Career Moves: A Guide for RPNs, really resonates with my own experience. I entered nursing as a second career after supporting my mother through her terminal illness and really understanding what an amazing profession nursing is. Caring for my mom during her battle with cancer was very rewarding and opened my eyes to a new world of possibilities. Coming from a family of nurses, I became curious about nursing myself, and that curiosity has fueled my journey ever since. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if I had started my nursing career sooner, but I know that every step of my journey taught me important lessons and has led me to be the leader I am today.

As we move forward, my focus will be on amplifying the contributions of RPNs to the health care system and ensuring that every RPN feels empowered to be the leader they want to be. Together, we are creating a future where RPNs are recognized for the incredible value they bring to healthcare. We must all continue to advocate for a healthcare system that truly supports us by demonstrating a tireless commitment to amplifying the contributions of RPNs. We must ensure that our voices are heard, not just in the halls of healthcare institutions but in the policy decisions that impact our daily work. Let's continue to forge ahead, take risks, and believe in ourselves. Our profession is equipped and ready, full of potential to lead into the future, and I am excited to see where we go from here.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President. I am thrilled to continue working alongside all of you to create a stronger, more innovative future for our profession.

**Angela, RPN**

President, WeRPN Board of Directors



# Amplifying RPN leadership in home and community care through co-design



Sonia Nizzer

RPN leaders in the home and community care sector support large clinical teams, including personal support workers (PSWs), home support workers, and other community-based providers. Their role is multifaceted, integrating critical tasks like onboarding, training, performance management, and ensuring clients receive safe, high-quality care. One often overlooked aspect is monitoring and addressing team mental health and well-being.

**MENTAL** and emotional strain on home and community care workers reached new heights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong leadership emerged as a key factor in supporting staff resilience, and compassionate RPN leaders were identified as pivotal in helping workers manage and recover from the stresses of the pandemic.

That said, many RPN leaders report feeling underprepared to support their teams in navigating mental health challenges. In a sector where the demands on leadership are already high, leaders often find themselves balancing competing priorities without the right tools or necessary training to effectively address mental health and well-being.

Without the proper resources, RPN leaders may struggle to provide support or spend excessive time looking for external services, potentially at the expense of their own well-being.

## Equipping RPN leaders with the resources they need

VHA Home HealthCare led a participatory project across Ontario, engaging RPN leaders in home and community care to co-design a tool to assist leaders in better supporting their teams. Co-designing places RPN leaders at the center of decision-making so that the tools and strategies developed are directly relevant, practical, and aligned with their needs.

## RPNs designing solutions for RPNs

RPN leaders participated in virtual co-design workshops and engaged in collaborative design thinking to imagine and build a tool to better support their emotional support practices. With the help of the digital collaboration platform Mural, RPNs from diverse experiences and geographies came together to shape a prototype that met their needs.

RPN leaders identified five key design requirements for the tool:

### DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY & CUSTOMIZATION:

Integrate seamlessly into their on-the-go workflows.

### CONTEXT-SPECIFIC LANGUAGE:

Uses the language of home and community care.

### BEST PRACTICES & TIPS:

Practical strategies for monitoring and supporting staff mental health, such as recognizing burnout, practicing mindfulness, and facilitating sensitive conversations.

### INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING RESOURCES:

Allow customization based on each leader's practice setting and incorporate existing workplace resources.

### COMMUNITY RESOURCE DIRECTORY:

Region-specific health and social care services to help leaders address the diverse needs of their teams.

Beyond these practical features, RPN leaders emphasized the importance of **organizational support** for adoption—especially the need for protected time to engage in the critical work of supporting staff mental health.

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## Introducing ‘The Notebook’ – A resource and toolkit to support RPN leadership practice

From these requirements, we co-created a prototype called ‘The Notebook’. This tool represents the resources RPN leaders need to monitor and support mental health and well-being across their care teams.

The Notebook is envisioned as a **living toolbox**—a dynamic resource filled with essential, easy-to-reference information to guide RPN leaders when addressing staff mental health challenges. Its design mimics the feel of a physical notebook, something familiar yet easily accessible in a digital format and adaptable to changing needs.

The prototype features nine interactive ‘folder tabs,’ each covering a specific topic identified by the RPN leaders. The content is structured and fillable, allowing users to customize the tool based on the teams’ unique needs.

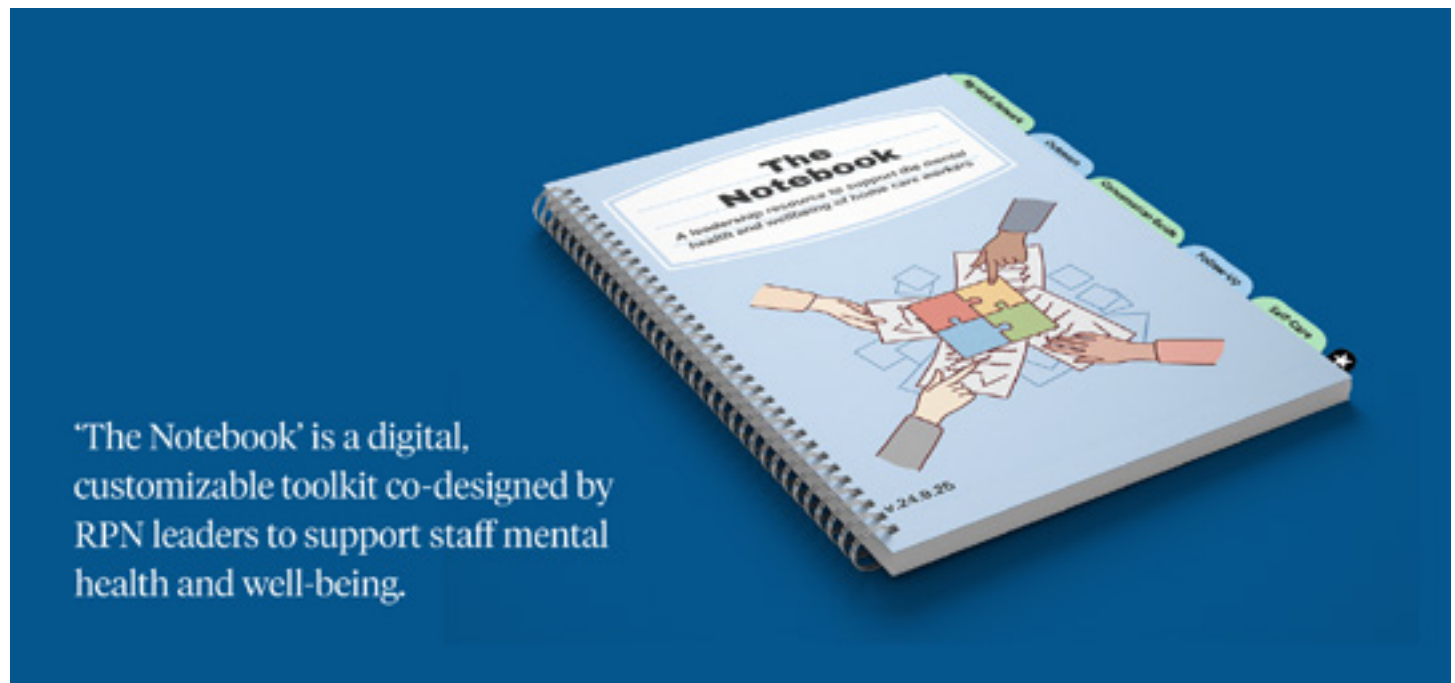
## Supporting RPN Leaders in Practice

This work shows that while RPN leaders already demonstrate immense compassion and practical strategies in supporting staff, they need additional resources and structures to respond appropriately to staff mental health.

## Making this tool a reality

The journey doesn’t end here. We’re continuing to refine the prototype based on ongoing feedback from RPN leaders and working to identify the best structures for **implementation, evaluation, and sustainability**. While we’re excited to explore how this could be rolled out at VHA, we know the need for this kind of resource goes beyond our organization.

We’re eager to hear from the broader RPN leader community: **Could ‘The Notebook’ work for you? How would you implement it at your own organization?** Let’s continue the conversation and find ways to support RPN leaders across the home and community care sector in tackling the critical challenge of staff well-being.



## The Power of Mentorship

From transitioning from the classroom to clinical settings to exploring specialized practice areas, the career trajectory of an RPN is rarely a straight line. One powerful resource that can make all the difference? Mentorship.

### What Makes Mentorship Meaningful

“Mentorship means learning from someone else’s lived experience or teaching someone from your own lived experience,” explains Jessica Lavis, an RPN who has experienced both sides of this valuable relationship. “It consists of a mentor and mentee connection where you’re guiding an individual through a certain stage of their life, career, or education.”

This guidance becomes particularly crucial given that nursing is a profession built on continuous learning and adaptation. Nursing education, comprehensive as it may be, simply cannot prepare practitioners for every situation they’ll encounter. “Nursing consists of so many different specialties, which require different skills and different knowledge,” says Lavis. “I don’t believe that nursing school could possibly prepare you for absolutely everything.”

This reality makes mentorship not just beneficial but essential for professional growth and development.

### Finding the Right Mentor

While the benefits of mentorship are clear, finding the right mentor requires thoughtful consideration. Lavis, who transitioned from bedside nursing to infection control three years ago, emphasizes that the relationship must extend beyond knowledge transfer alone:

“Do your research. Find somebody who has the experience or expertise that you’re seeking, but also make sure they’re a good fit for you. Don’t just choose somebody solely based on their knowledge, but try to find somebody who you have a strong connection with and who’s willing to take the time to be a mentor to you.”

This connection forms the foundation of effective mentorship. The best mentors aren’t just knowledgeable – they’re approachable, kind, patient, and make mentees feel comfortable asking questions.

### The Transformation Through Mentorship

The impact of effective mentorship can be profound. For Lavis, her manager’s mentorship transformed her confidence and outlook on her specialized role. “My current mentor has helped me become confident in my new role. She encourages me to seek out new opportunities. She’s approachable, kind, patient, and makes me feel comfortable coming to her with questions.”

These positive experiences often create a ripple effect, inspiring mentees to become mentors themselves. “I want to be the same mentor that she is to me, to somebody else,” Lavis suggests, highlighting how mentorship becomes a self-perpetuating cycle that strengthens the entire profession.

### WeRPN’s Mentorship Program: A Valuable Resource

For registered practical nurses in Ontario, WeRPN’s mentorship program offers a structured pathway to these meaningful connections. “The mentorship program is a valuable resource for seeking guidance because it allows nurses to easily find and learn from someone who has experience in a specific area of interest,” says Lavis. “This is especially important for those who might not have access to a mentor.”

In a time where healthcare systems face unprecedented challenges and the demand for skilled nurses continues to grow, programs that support and retain qualified practitioners are invaluable. To Lavis, WeRPN’s mentorship initiative makes finding a mentor “easy and accessible and provides an opportunity for ongoing support and leadership throughout somebody’s career.”

### Advice for New Nurses

For newly graduated RPNs or those transitioning to new specialties, Lavis offers this encouragement: “Use your resources, whether it’s mentors, senior staff, charge nurses, educators, podcasts, webinars – whatever it may be. Take advantage of all the resources available to you and use them to your benefit.”

Perhaps most importantly, she emphasizes the value of questions: “Don’t be afraid to ask questions. There are no silly questions. That’s how we learn.”

The journey to becoming a confident and competent registered practical nurse may seem overwhelming at times, but the support of mentors and professional networks like WeRPN helps ensure you’re never truly alone in the process. “I know that it can be overwhelming,” Lavis says. “I’ve been there. But you’ve got this, and we’re here to support you.”

# QUEEN'S PARK DISPATCHES

RPNs on the frontlines of advocacy at Queen's Park

**OUR** delegation spent much of the day reiterating the priorities detailed in our Budget submission, which is structured around three key areas.

Recognizing the critical need to retain our current nursing workforce, we spoke about the importance of investing in RPNs and providing opportunities for professional advancement. This request included a recommendation for the government to make the BEGIN funding stream permanent to ensure RPNs can continue to receive this benefit for decades to come.

The second concern we brought forward was burnout, an issue many of our members are far too familiar with. Many members shared personal stories and experiences, highlighting the detrimental impact of inadequate staffing on the mental health of nurses and overall safety in the workplace. As a solution, we recommended introducing legislation mandating

safe nurse-to-patient ratios across all healthcare settings, including hospitals and long-term care.

Finally, our members recommended increased and harmonized RPN wages to match the expertise and expansion of the roles, responsibilities and workload of RPNs.

We are grateful to every member who joined us for our fall Advocacy Day. Your participation amplified our message and strengthened our collective voice, and the conversations you had with decision makers are vital to shaping the future of nursing. We appreciate your dedication to making a difference and hope to see you later this year at our next Advocacy Day!

Continued investment in educational pathways, Establishing safe nurse-to-patient ratios, Parity in RPN wages, aligned with cost of living.

1



Continued investment in educational pathways.

2



Establishing safe nurse-to-patient ratios.

3



Parity in RPN wages, aligned with cost of living



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## Election advocacy: amplifying the voices of RPNs

During the 2025 election, we were hard at work ensuring our membership was armed with the tools they needed to advocate for WeRPN policy objectives with candidates of all parties.

During the February campaign period, we provided members with an election toolkit, including an overview of key asks, advocacy dos and don'ts, details about campaign promises from all major parties related to nurses and the broader healthcare system, social media engagement guidelines and suggested questions for candidates and canvassers.

Recognizing the importance of digital advocacy, WeRPN was also active on social media during the election to amplify the voices of RPNs. We shared compelling content across our platforms, designed to raise awareness of the issues facing RPNs and encourage action. We urged our followers to contact their local candidates, share their own experiences, and participate in the election to make the concerns of RPNs heard loud and clear.

Finally, our CEO, Dianne Martin, and President of WeRPN's Board of Directors, Angela Corneil, shared thought leadership pieces on LinkedIn in the days leading up to the election to underscore the importance of investing in our RPNs.



Whether it was through empowering our members to take action with the campaign toolkit, sharing the most pressing issues facing RPNs on social media, or engaging in an informative conversation on LinkedIn via thought leadership, WeRPN was active during this election campaign and will continue to be your advocate with government and healthcare professionals.



# 2025 Board Nominations

The deadline to submit nominations is Tuesday, July 15th, 2025.

## Region 1

**LHIN Numbers:** 1&2  
**LHIN Names:** Erie-St. Clair and South West  
2-year term

## Region 3

**LHIN Numbers:** 4&6  
**LHIN Names:** Hamilton Niagara  
Haldimand Brant & Mississauga Halton  
2-year term

## Region 5

**LHIN Numbers:** 10&11  
**LHIN Names:** South East & Champlain  
2-year term

## Region 6

**LHIN Numbers:** 9&12  
**LHIN Names:** Central East &  
North Simcoe Muskoka  
1-year term

## Region 7

**LHIN Numbers:** 13&14  
**LHIN Names:** North East & North West  
2-year term



Retirement is a major milestone, but for many RPNs, it raises questions about financial security, emotional readiness, and life after nursing. While some eagerly anticipate their next chapter, others feel uncertain about when and how to retire.

**BETTY FEHR, RPN**, retired in September 2024 after an exemplary career in Home and Community Care (HCC) with SE Health. She spent 12 years as a personal support supervisor before transitioning to teaching at the SE Career College of Health. Eventually, she began managing the College's instructors and her coworkers — people she was reluctant to leave.

"Losing your work family is a more difficult transition [than retirement itself]," says Betty.

## When is the right time to retire?

There is no universal retirement age, but many RPNs retire between 60 and 70. Financial considerations (including

savings, pensions, and cost of living) are an essential part of retirement planning, so it's wise to start early in your career. Other factors influencing timing include:

### PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Workplace demands can become challenging with age.

### CAREER SATISFACTION

Some nurses work longer due to passion for their job, while others may feel burnt out and ready for change.

Betty knew she was ready to retire when she realized she was getting tired and had accomplished everything she set out to do. The completion of two major projects marked a turning point, as did her confidence in leaving behind a strong, capable team.

"Give yourself time," she advises. "Make a decision, and if you have to prolong it to complete [a project, for example,] that's okay."

It's also recommended that retiring nurses keep their registration current for up to three years following retirement before moving to the "non practicing" category or giving up their registration altogether.

## Staying active and engaged post-retirement

Retirement doesn't mean the end of an impactful career. Many retired RPNs continue contributing through volunteering, mentorship, and education. Others use the opportunity to reconnect with personal passions, hobbies, and travel.

To ease into retirement, Betty joined a coffee club before leaving work, giving herself time to adjust. She attended her first in-person "Coffee Day" on the day she retired and now meets with the group every Thursday. Through this club, she made new friends and discovered additional activities, such as an exercise group she joins twice a week and weekly trivia nights at Boston Pizza.

Spending time with family has also become a priority. Betty and her husband love attending their grandchildren's hockey games, especially since two of them live just across the street. She also volunteers with her church and is considering mentoring new nurses in the future. On quieter days, she indulges in one of her favourite pastimes – speed reading, often finishing at least one book per day while curled up in her recliner.

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## Emotional preparation


Beyond finances, adjusting to retirement can be an emotional journey. Nurses who have dedicated their lives to caring for others may struggle with a shift in identity. Staying connected to former colleagues, joining social groups, and setting personal goals can help ease the transition.

Betty recommends taking a vacation before officially retiring to get accustomed to the change. She spent four weeks in her hometown of Saskatchewan, enjoying time with family and friends.

Whether retirement is years away or just around the corner, proactive planning can make the process smoother and more fulfilling. By taking strategic steps now, RPNs can ensure a retirement

that is both financially secure and personally rewarding.

“When we were working, we knew we needed to show up and do our best job every day, and I think we need to carry that into our retirement,” says Betty. “Instead of work, now we need to show up for ourselves and our community and continue to give our best.”



Many retired RPNs continue contributing through volunteering, mentorship, and education.

Others use the opportunity to reconnect with personal passions, hobbies, and travel.



# NAVIGATING THE EXPERIENCE AS A NURSE.



## Taking a Pause to Talk Menopause

Menopause is a natural stage of life that affects half the population, yet it remains a topic often overlooked in workplaces – including healthcare.

**FOR RPNs**, menopause presents a dual challenge: providing care to patients experiencing menopausal symptoms while also managing their own symptoms in a demanding, high-pressure environment. As awareness of menopause grows, it is critical that healthcare workplaces foster supportive policies and cultures that empower RPNs to continue delivering high-quality care while maintaining their wellbeing.

### The double burden: working through menopause as a nurse

“As a nurse, you are expected to be present, to care for others, but when you’re experiencing symptoms of menopause, it can be difficult to function at your best,” says Kelly Baskerville, a Clinical Educator and longtime nursing leader. “Brain fog, fatigue, unpredictable symptoms – it all impacts how we show up for our patients and our teams.”

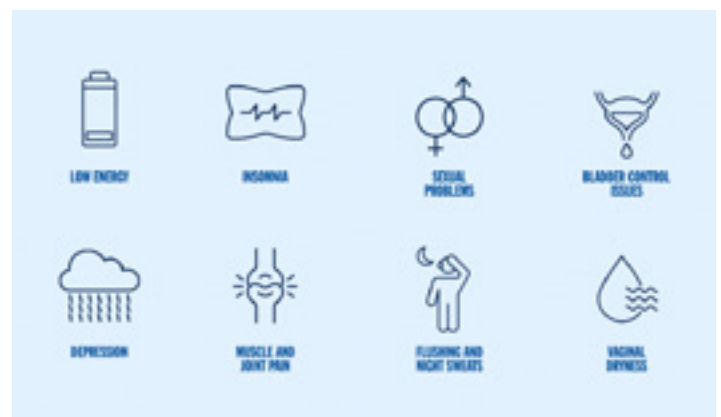
Despite the widespread impact of menopause, many nurses suffer in silence. “We don’t talk about it enough. Nurses are socially conditioned to push through, to not make an issue of their own health,” Kelly explains. “Yet we know that unreported lost time, presenteeism, and even early retirement are real consequences of unmanaged menopause in the workplace.”

A 2022 survey conducted by the Canadian Women’s Health Network found that nearly one in four individuals considered reducing their work hours or leaving their jobs due to

menopause symptoms. For RPNs, whose roles require constant attentiveness and physical endurance, workplace policies that fail to accommodate these challenges only add to the burden.

### Did you know there are more than 30 symptoms associated with perimenopause and menopause?

Most of us know about hot flashes, but how many of us understand that heart palpitations, headaches, body aches and a host of other symptoms are part of the menopause transition?



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## **The need for workplace support and policy change**

Kelly, who has spent years working in quality improvement with an interest in occupational health, believes that menopause will soon face the same workplace rights battles as pregnancy and mental health. “We need to normalize conversations about menopause and create safe spaces for nurses to seek support. Right now, too many are managing their own symptoms in silence because they fear stigma or performance repercussions.”

Practical workplace strategies could include uniform adaptations, access to menopause-related health resources, the use of tech and AI to support nurses in their note-taking responsibilities, and establishing peer support networks. “If we can normalize and support this in a professional, fair, and empathetic way, it benefits everyone,” Kelly adds.

She also highlights the importance of research and advocacy. “There’s very little research on menopause in general and especially in the context of the nursing workforce. We need data to guide clinical practice, workplace policies, and retention strategies. If we don’t start prioritizing this now, we risk losing experienced and highly skilled nurses unnecessarily and at a time when we need them most.”

Healthcare leaders can model this change by prioritizing menopause learning and taking action to review organizational workplace wellness programs and policies for inclusiveness.

## **Moving forward: supporting RPNs through every stage of their career**

Menopause is not a condition to be treated in isolation but a phase of life that requires comprehensive workplace consideration. By fostering awareness, implementing supportive policies, and encouraging open conversations, healthcare employers can ensure that RPNs not only provide excellent patient care but also receive the understanding and accommodations they need to thrive in their careers.

“When nurses start talking to each other, patterns emerge, and we start making demands,” Kelly notes. “That’s how change happens.”

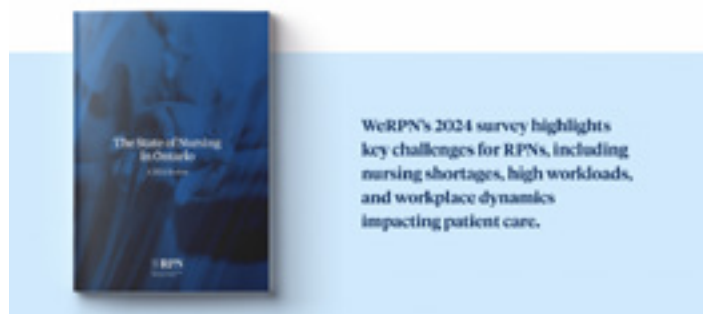
As Canada continues to prioritize workplace equity, supporting RPNs through menopause is not just about individual well-being – it is about sustaining a resilient, compassionate, and effective nursing workforce. By addressing menopause in the workplace, we not only support nurses in their own health journeys but also ensure that their expertise and contributions continue to strengthen the healthcare system for years to come.

# Advancing RPN Knowledge: The Power of Research in Strengthening Our Profession

Jen Calver, RPN, PhD (candidate)  
WeRPN, Research Coordinator

**SOME** of the most used evidence sources in nursing include scholarly research, nursing texts and information resources from reputable institutions such as national health agencies. Evidence-based practices are rooted in clinical nursing expertise, patient values, and research. As RPNs, we use a combination of evidence, clinical expertise, patient value and input to help make complex clinical and practice decisions. WeRPN research program aims to continue to drive evidence to support RPNs and increase the representation of RPN roles, impact and credibility.

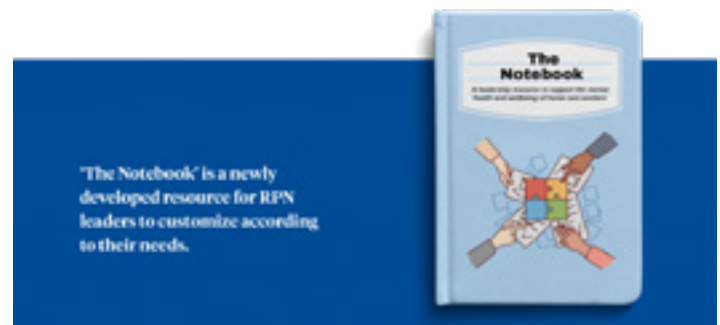
WeRPN's 2024 nursing survey uncovered ongoing challenges reported by RPNs, such as the negative impact of the nursing shortage on patient care, intention to leave the profession, and experiences with high workloads and difficult workplace dynamics. In 2024, there was an influx of RPN publications by various research teams that explored roles and contributions, recruitment and retention factors, role transition, bridging education programs, resilience and emotional intelligence, and work disparities. What does increased literature do for RPNs, and why does it matter?



Role clarity has been a long-standing priority for RPNs. We know that we are not 'just RPNs.' We are skilled nurses who make valuable contributions across health settings. We are also advocates for nurses and patients, and essential in improving healthcare. Accessing literature about RPNs' experience, roles,

and impact was challenging. Much of the available literature was either not specific to our provincial or national nursing context and rarely involved RPNs on the project team. The lack of RPN-focused/inclusive information created a gap in workforce planning, organizational staffing assignments, and even practice resources. The good news is – the tides are changing. More research and project teams are including RPNs as key members, participants and advisors to help inform all stages of inquiry and outcomes.

The target audience for these publications often includes policy and organizational decision-makers, nurse educators, organizations, and health workers. When researchers publish their work, it creates the opportunity to review, compare, critically appraise and interpret findings, which will ultimately advance knowledge and bring about innovation. 'The Notebook' – a resource and toolkit to support RPN leadership practice by VHA Home HealthCare is one example of a newly developed resource for RPN leaders to customize according to their needs. Mobilizing research knowledge and information creates an opportunity to generate discussions, share insights, and exchange knowledge that addresses issues and problems in nursing and healthcare to help foster sustainable solutions. RPNs' voices, experience, and knowledge are critical parts of shaping the future of healthcare.



Research comes in many forms. In our foundation of practice as RPNs, we are expected to research and respond to relevant clinical data and information and use research to build an evidence-informed practice [source]. Together, we can strengthen the type and quality of information used to generate evidence, build each other up, and bring forward new knowledge and key messages to address practice issues or innovations.

As a WeRPN member, your professional association will help you stay up to date on trends and issues, access emerging evidence, and attend RPN events and opportunities. WeRPN helps come together from across the province to share, exchange, and mobilize our knowledge as nursing professionals. Thank you for all you do on behalf of our profession.



# NAVIGATING CAREER TRANSITIONS

## Mid-Career Moves: A Guide for RPNs

For many Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) in Ontario, career paths are not always linear. While some remain in the same role for decades, others find themselves seeking new challenges, exploring different specialties, or even pivoting to entirely new healthcare fields. Whether driven by burnout, personal experiences, or a desire for professional growth, changing jobs mid-career can be an exciting and daunting transition.



RPNs often change career paths for a variety of reasons. Some seek new challenges to expand their skills or explore different healthcare settings, while others are inspired by personal experiences. Take **Christopher Reilly, RPN**, as an example. Christopher decided to specialize in mental health and addictions after experiencing personal loss and witnessing the rising prevalence of mental health issues in his community.

For others, the desire for a better work-life balance leads to roles with more predictable schedules or reduced physical demands. Others pursue additional education to advance into leadership, teaching, or administrative positions.



**Blanche Durocher, RPN**, is an accomplished academic and self-professed lifelong learner with a B.A. in Psychology and a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Management, along with her nursing designation. On her journey to becoming the inspiring leader she is today, Blanche gained experience across various sectors, including acute care and long-term care (LTC). After having her

daughter, she transitioned to home and community care (HCC), drawn to the role's flexibility.

"I was able to take care of my daughter and go to work," says Blanche. "Being in the community has let me be a hands-on parent and balance being a nurse and a mom; it allows me to be the best I can be in both of those worlds."



## Exploring new career avenues

RPNs have many career options beyond traditional bedside care, including:

### SPECIALIZING IN A NEW FIELD

Mental health, palliative care, acute care, and community health are just a few pathways.

### EDUCATION AND TRAINING ROLES

Teaching future nurses or becoming a mentor.

### HEALTHCARE ADMINISTRATION

Working as a care coordinator, policy advisor, or in quality improvement.

### ALTERNATIVE HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

Moving from hospitals to long-term care, clinics, or private practice.

Successfully transitioning to a new career begins with self-assessment. Reflect on your interests, strengths, and long-term goals to identify the path that best aligns with your aspirations. From there, consider enrolling in specialized courses, attending webinars, or obtaining certifications to build the skills needed for your desired role.

Betty Fehr, RPN, highly recommends identifying your goals and creating a plan to achieve them. After taking WeRPN's Introduction to Leadership course, she realized she wanted to pursue teaching as an RPN.

"I was so shocked because I didn't think there were any opportunities [to teach as an RPN]," says Betty. "And within a few months, I was teaching! That was a direct result of taking the Leadership training offered by WeRPN."

WeRPN offers a variety of career resources to help you achieve your goals – from online courses that enhance your knowledge, skills, and marketability to information on continuing education programs that support career growth. Once you've made your plan, check out our job board to connect you with your dream role!

Networking is equally important – connecting with colleagues, mentors, and professional associations can offer valuable insights and open doors to new opportunities. Job shadowing can also provide a firsthand look at your chosen field, helping you make an informed decision before committing to the switch. Finally, when you're ready to apply, tailor your resume and cover letter to emphasize transferable skills that showcase your readiness for this new chapter.

## Overcoming fears and challenges

Changing careers can be intimidating, but many RPNs successfully transition with the proper preparation. Seeking mentorship, researching opportunities, and taking gradual steps can make the process smoother. If you're uncertain, start with small changes – such as enrolling in a course or networking with professionals in your desired field.

With Ontario's diverse healthcare landscape, RPNs have countless opportunities to reshape their careers to align with their passions and professional goals.

Explore leadership theory, communication, problem-solving, and more – designed for RPNs, delivered online at your pace.



# Navigating a new nursing career in today's healthcare landscape.



## Starting Out Strong

Beginning a career as a Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) in Ontario is both exciting and challenging. With nursing shortages and a complex healthcare landscape, new nurses enter environments shaped by the lingering effects of COVID-19 and systemic challenges. The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) reports over 60,000 practicing RPNs, many facing the emotional toll of 'legacy trauma' – the accumulated stress experienced by healthcare workers.

Building resilience is crucial for new nurses entering the profession. A recent study published in BMC Health Services Research highlights strategies such as fostering strong support networks, engaging in professional development, and utilizing workplace resources to manage stress effectively. Additionally, the Canadian Nurses Association emphasizes the importance of moral resilience – cultivating ethical awareness and confidence to navigate challenging situations without emotional exhaustion (source). Having a best friend at work, or a group of trusted colleagues who look out for each other each day, is also key to resilience. A strong sense of camaraderie provides emotional support, reduces feelings of isolation, and creates a workplace culture where nurses feel valued and understood, ultimately helping them manage the demands of their profession with greater confidence and well-being.

### Leaning on experience, embracing change

Learning from experienced nurses is invaluable, but innovation often comes from those who question existing practices. The healthcare system evolves through fresh perspectives, yet navigating environments where burnout and compassion

fatigue are prevalent can be difficult. WeRPN's annual survey, The State of Nursing in Ontario: A 2024 Review, highlights that nearly half of nurses consider leaving the profession within five years, emphasizing the need for resilience and strong professional boundaries.

### Building resilience and boundaries

Resilience isn't about "toughing it out" but involves active strategies for coping with stress, maintaining work-life balance, and finding meaning in the profession. Research from BMC Health Services Research suggests that peer support programs, mentorship opportunities, and self-care practices play a significant role in helping nurses build resilience (source). The Canadian Nurses Association further emphasizes setting ethical boundaries, which can prevent moral distress and help sustain long-term career satisfaction. Establishing limits on emotional exposure, stepping back when necessary, and prioritizing personal recovery is essential to protect against burnout.



**WeRPN's annual survey highlights that nearly half of nurses consider leaving the profession within five years, emphasizing the need for resilience and strong professional boundaries.**

### **Critical thinking as an essential tool**

New nurses must develop strong critical thinking skills to assess situations, adapt to changing conditions, and make informed decisions under pressure. Recognizing when to rely on institutional knowledge versus questioning practices that no longer serve patient care is crucial. WeRPN offers a variety of development programs that promote critical thinking, leadership, and evidence-based practice.

### **Moving forward with strength**

Starting a nursing career today is challenging yet full of opportunities to shape healthcare's future. By learning from experienced nurses while maintaining fresh perspectives, setting boundaries, building resilience, and honing critical thinking skills, new RPNs can navigate the profession with confidence and purpose. Your journey is just beginning – embrace it with curiosity and determination, knowing you are making a difference every day.



## Study Smarter

Nursing students know the feeling all too well – trying to drink from the educational firehose while mastering complex procedures, memorizing medications, and surviving clinical rotations. In fact, one could wonder if the brain can actually absorb all of this information. Here's how WeRPN's resources can make this challenging journey a little smoother.

### The brain deserves better than all-nighters

Most students have been there – highlighting textbooks until they glow and pulling caffeine-fueled study marathons. But science suggests there's a better way.



#### CHUNKING IT DOWN

Rather than one four-hour study block (which, realistically, often includes

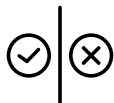
significant time lost to distractions), students benefit more from dedicated 30-45 minute focused sessions throughout the day. The brain forms stronger neural connections with repeated exposure rather than one exhausting cram session. Three or four daily “micro-sessions” consistently outperform one marathon study period.



#### CREATING A FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

Many students believe they're excellent

multitaskers, but cognitive science disagrees. Each time a notification is checked, the brain needs about 23 minutes to fully refocus. Creating a distraction-free zone – silencing notifications, using website blockers, and letting support systems know they're temporarily unavailable – pays dividends in learning efficiency. This is a useful technique for RPNs to master.



#### RELENTLESS SELF-TESTING

Rereading notes feels productive but often creates a dangerous “familiarity”

that masks actual understanding. Instead, closing that textbook and asking

questions like: “What are the five steps in this procedure?” or “What are the contraindications for this medication?” strengthens memory pathways far more effectively than passive review. This retrieval practice is among the most powerful learning techniques available.



#### SLEEP: THE BRAIN'S CLEANUP CREW

During sleep, the brain isn't just resting – it's

consolidating memories and clearing out cellular debris. That all-nighter before an exam? It's literally blocking the brain's ability to organize what's been learned. Prioritizing those 7-8 hours of sleep can significantly impact exam performance.



## How WeRPN Supports Nursing Students

WeRPN has developed resources specifically designed to support evidence-based learning strategies and help students thrive both in school and as they transition to practice.



### SELF-CARE BEYOND THE BUZZWORDS

The WeRPN Self-Care Toolkit offers practical strategies for maintaining physical and mental reserves when they're constantly being depleted. Whether students are struggling with sleep quality, organizational challenges, or mental clarity, the toolkit provides actionable solutions.



### CONQUERING THE CNO EXAM

For many nursing students, the registration exam looms like a final boss battle. WeRPN's RPN Exam Prep Modules break down complex

concepts, provide practice questions, and build confidence for this crucial milestone.

Members can log into their WeRPN member account > Learning Management System dashboard > Exam Prep Modules



### NEW GRADUATE NAVIGATION SYSTEM

Many recall the overwhelming feeling when first applying to nursing school—and many new graduates experience the same when starting their first position. The WeRPN New Grad Toolkit helps bridge that gap, addressing common challenges and building confidence for those launching their RPN careers.

## A Professional community awaits

WeRPN membership provides invaluable connection to a community of RPNs who understand exactly what nursing students are experiencing. The

association advocates for the profession while providing tools that support growth from student to practicing nurse.

The journey to becoming an RPN is challenging, but students don't have to navigate it alone. WeRPN supports them every step of the way – from late-night study sessions to their first day on the unit. Their success is the profession's success.

Students and new grads can visit their WeRPN member account to explore all the benefits awaiting them – right after they get some sleep (or perhaps after a quick retrieval practice session).

Visit our **Self-Care Toolkit** to explore specific self-care challenges and access relevant learning materials.

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## Feeling the Squeeze

Nursing is a profession that demands passion, knowledge, skill, and resilience. Beyond your shifts, many of you juggle full-time work with full-time life, including the needs of growing children, aging parents or household responsibilities. You are the backbone of both your workplace and family, stretched thin yet expected to give endlessly.

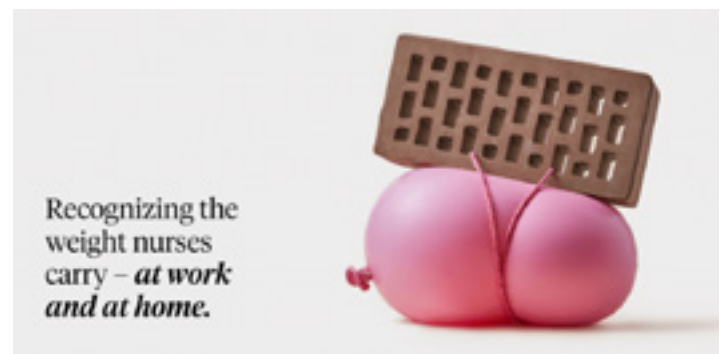
Some days feel like a constant state of triage – balancing urgent needs while ensuring nothing critical is overlooked. At work, you're a trusted professional, relied upon for expertise and leadership. At home, you're a caregiver in a different way, guiding children, supporting a partner, or ensuring your parents receive care. Amid all this, your own wellbeing often falls to the bottom of the list.

One of the most difficult challenges for nurses can be to even recognize your own health and well-being needs amidst all the demands. You may push through pain or exhaustion, convinced that caring for others always comes first. One nurse reflected on a time when she was experiencing severe pain in her side but didn't seek medical attention, continuing to work through the discomfort. It wasn't until months later, during an ultrasound for an unrelated issue, that it was discovered she had been silently suffering from metabolic liver disease. The delay in recognizing her own health was a painful reminder of how easy it is to neglect ourselves while we focus on everyone else's needs.

Another nurse shared a moment of clarity while caring for her ailing mother. She was in a panic, worried about missing one of her mother's dressings, which had soaked through. The homecare nurse who was caring for her mother gently took her aside and reminded her that, in that room, she was not a nurse but a daughter. She didn't need to carry the burden of guilt and stress that often accompanies the nursing profession. This moment was a gift, a reminder that it's okay to let go of the nurse hat for a moment and simply be present as a family member.

Self-care doesn't have to be elaborate; it can be as simple as taking a walk, reading, or listening to a favourite song on your commute home.

The pressure is immense. You may feel exhausted, burned out, or guilty for not having enough time for everything or everyone. When you do carve out a moment for yourself, guilt



can creep in. It can feel like no one fully sees the load you carry or how it never truly lets up.

We see you! If you feel overwhelmed, know that you are not alone. Admitting it is a testament to how much you give to your patients and loved ones. While there are no easy solutions, small shifts can help. Setting boundaries at work and home can create space for rest. Seeking support – whether from coworkers, friends, or professional resources – can provide relief. Self-care doesn't have to be elaborate; it can be as simple as taking a walk, reading, or listening to a favourite song on your commute home.

WeRPN's online Self-Care Toolkit includes modules focused on mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being.

Employers and healthcare organizations also have a role to play in supporting nurses by offering flexibility, when possible, wellness programs and support, and fostering a workplace culture that acknowledges these challenges in our profession. WeRPN also has your back by providing an online Self-Care Toolkit with modules focused on mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being.

Across Ontario, RPNs deliver the best care possible, but growing pressures in the healthcare system are increasing stress and anxiety. That's why self-care resources are essential – to help you maintain resilience while continuing to provide high-quality care.

Most importantly, we want you to feel seen. Your hard work – at work and at home – matters. Your exhaustion is valid. Your sacrifices are recognized. Through everything you manage, you deserve support, care, and the reminder that you, too, are worthy of rest. Thank you!