**Pulse**

**The hazards of nursing**

A staggering 18% of 18,348 Canadian nurses responding to a recent survey say their patients were “occasionally” or “frequently” administered the wrong medication or dose while in their care, according to the findings of a national survey of reported medication errors, from a high of 27.5% in Quebec, to a low of 6.5% in Newfoundland and Labrador. The remaining provinces fell within the 12.4%–14.9% range.

Quebec nurses also reported a higher incidence of patient infections originating within the hospital or health care setting in which they were employed. A phenomenal 42% of Quebec nurses say there was occasional or frequent nosocomial infection in their patients, slightly above the national average of 35.2%. The national average rose to 39.5% in a hospital setting, as compared to 3% in a long-term care facility, 15.1% in community health clinics, or 17.9% in other settings (e.g., physicians’ offices, private nursing agencies, etc.).

Roughly one-third of nurses said their patients were injured in a fall in 2005, ranging from a high of 63.4% in long-term care facilities and 26.1% in hospitals, to 15.4% in community health settings and 17.4% in other settings.

Some 29% of the respondents indicated that they’d been physically assaulted by a patient in the year 2005, while 44% said they’d been subjected to emotional abuse. The survey, a joint initiative of the Canadian Institute of Health Information, Statistics Canada, and Health Canada, saw roughly 19,000 of the nation’s 314,900 employed nurses interviewed about their work environment and health.

Equally surprising were survey findings related to quality of care, including medication mishaps and other adverse events such as infections originating from a hospital or health care setting.

According to the survey, patients are most likely to receive the wrong medication, or the wrong dose of a medication, in a long-term care facility (22.8%), as opposed to 19.2% in hospitals (Table 1). There was also a significant variation in the regional distribution of reported medication errors, from a high of 27.5% in Quebec, to a low of 6.5% in Newfoundland and Labrador. The remaining provinces fell within the 12.4%–14.9% range.

Table 1: Adverse events reported by 15,174 nurses providing direct care, by work setting, Canada, 2005

| Work setting                  | Event in past 12 mo that occurred occasionally or frequently; % of nurses* |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                              | Patient received wrong medication or dose | Complaint from patient or family members | Patient injured in fall | Reporting nurse injured while working |
| Hospital                     | 19.2                                       | 39.9                                      | 26.1                     | 10.6                                     |
| Long-term care facility      | 22.8                                       | 50.7                                      | 63.4                     | 9.6                                      |
| Community health setting     | 7.8                                        | 23.5                                      | 15.4                     | 3.6                                      |
| Other†                       | 9.3                                        | 23.2                                      | 17.4                     | 2.8‡                                     |
| All                          | 17.9                                       | 38.3                                      | 31.0                     | 8.9                                      |

Source: 2005 National Survey of the Work and Health of Nurses, Statistics Canada.

*Tan cells = significantly higher percentage than estimated for the other categories of nurses in the group combined (p < 0.05). Green cells = significantly lower percentage than estimated for the other categories of nurses in the group combined (p < 0.05).

†Includes physicians’ offices, private nursing agencies, educational institutions, governments and associations.

‡Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3% (interpret with caution).