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The Current State of Rural and Remote Nurses in Alberta

Abstract

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Introduction: In rural areas where 19.4% of Albertans live, from 2003 – 2011, there was a larger decrease in the number of RNs and NPs compared to the urban areas. In the face of this decline more knowledge about the realities of rural nursing will inform future policy and planning to ensure a sustained rural and remote nursing workforce.

Design and Methods: The Nursing Practice in Rural and Remote Canada II national survey examines the roles, work settings and practice modes of all members of the regulated nursing workforce including Registered Nurses (RNs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) in rural and remote communities across the country. This cross-section survey was sent to 442 RNs and NPs in Alberta in 2014 - 2015 with the assistance of the provincial nursing regulatory body. The survey was available in English and French, online or paper form.

Results/Conclusion: A total of 174 eligible surveys (39% return rate) were received from Alberta RNs and NPs from the full range of practice settings including primary care, acute care, community health, home care, mental health and addictions, and long-term care. This presentation focuses on describing: 1) the sample of rural and remote RNs and NPs in Alberta (gender, age, employment status, number of rural/remote communities they have worked in, size of their rural/remote community & size of their home community); 2) job satisfaction; 3) perceptions of their scope of practice; and, 4) experiences and perceptions of interprofessional practice.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Our findings show the complexity of the care provided by RNs and NPs to Alberta residents in rural and remote areas within a context of limited health care infrastructure and chronic shortages of health care personnel. Workplace supports, accessible continuing education and the development of policies illustrating a rural lens will help support rural and remote RNs and NPs and importantly the Alberta people they serve.