The Canadian RNFA Odyssey

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The Registered Nurse First Assistant (RNFA) is an experienced perioperative nurse with additional education and skills, functioning at an advanced level of nursing practice. The RNFA is a unique position that may encompass all areas of perioperative patient care, (preoperative, intraoperative and postoperative).

Past History

During the years 1989-1992, discussions about expanded roles for perioperative nurses began in British Columbia.

In 1992-1993 national surveys were conducted by the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) to explore the scope of practice of the perioperative nurse and the need for expanded roles.

Data collected confirmed the need and interest for the RNFA role.

Present Status of RNFA's in Canada

Within the **Yukon** and the **North West Territories** there are no practising RNFA's .

British Columbia (8 RNFA's, 1 student)

In 1990 the British Columbia Operating Room Nurses Group (BCORNG) had the support of the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia (RNABC) in verifying that the RNFA role was within the scope of nursing practice.

A meeting was held with the provincial Ministry of Health in 1997 & 1999. In 2000, approval was obtained from the Health Risk Management Committee and the RNFA role was accepted as safe practice and within the scope of nursing practice.

In 1999, the RNFA role was challenged by a group of General Practitioners from the BC Medical Association.

In March 2001, an RNFA position was initiated at the BC Children's Hospital.

Alberta (3 RNFA's, 1 RNFA student)

In 1993 the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (AARN) approved a document entitled "Determining the Appropriate Scope of Practice for Particular Practice Settings: Guidelines for the Registered Nurse", stating that no additional legislation was required for RNFA's to practice in Alberta.

Alberta does not have any RNFA's functioning in this role at present.

Saskatchewan (2 RNFA's, 4 RNFA students)

In 1996 the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association (SRNA) supported the role of the RNFA, however it took until June 21, 2000 to have the Hospital Standards Act revoked, which stated that only physicians could assist during surgery.

In December, 2000 an RNFA pilot project was accepted involving three RNFA's at the Royal University Hospital, Saskatoon City Hospital and St. Paul's Hospital.

Manitoba (6 RNFA's, 1 RNFA student)

In 1999 amendments to both the Medical Act and the Registered Nurses Act brought the role of the RNFA into the scope of nursing practice.

In July, 1999 an RNFA pilot project was approved by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. This was renewed in July, 2000.

Ontario (25 RNFA's, 23 RNFA students)

In July, 1999, the College of Nurses of Ontario recognized the RNFA role to be within the scope of nursing practice.

On January 20, 2000, the "RNFA Committee" of the Operating Room Nurses Association of Ontario (ORNAO) was formed.

In November 2000, two (2) RNFA's were hired by Trillium Health Centre in Mississauga.

Orillia Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Orillia hired two (2) RNFA's in December 2000.

A pilot project involving one (1) RNFA began in March, 2001 at the Hamilton Health Science Corporation.

Québec (34 RNFA's, 16 RNFA students)

In September 1994, the Ordre des Infirmieres et Infirmiers du Quebec wrote a position paper clearly supporting the RNFA role, being the first to do so in Canada.

In 1996 the Heart Institute of Montreal implemented the first Canadian RNFA pilot project.

In 1996 an RNFA prograrn began at the Three-Rivers University of Quebec.

In December 2000, official provincial legislation about the delegation of medical acts and the function of the RNFA was proposed and accepted.

Newfoundland

In 1996 the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNN) endorsed registered nurses functioning as first assistants, and they have recently established a recognized RNFA program through Memorial University: **The Centre for Nursing Studies.**

Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick

These three provinces do not have any practising RNFA's at this time.

The RNFA's Future

The challenges that RNFA's across Canada seem to be facing at this time are physician acceptance and reimbursement.

ORNAC is currently working on developing a national RNFA competency statements.

April, 2001 was the date set for the first National RNFA Meeting held in Banff, Alberta, at the 17th National ORNAC Conference.

It has been projected that Canada will have a decrease in the number of surgical residents and a shortage of physicians across the country in the near future. This, coupled with the need to look at cost savings and optimal patient care, leads us to believe that the RNFA will become a significant contributor to the health care of surgical patients in Canada in the near future. ❐

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All graduated from the BC Institute of Technology RNF program in December, 2000. They are currently members of the Operating Room Nurses Association of Ontario-RNFA Interest Group and are seeking employment as RNFA's.