

# Nursing shortage anticipated in Nova Scotia

BY KATIE TINKER

By the year 2003 Nova Scotia could be short up to 2000 nurses, say the organizations that jointly represent every registered nurse in the province.

The reason for the shortage is simple: too many nurses are leaving the profession, and not enough graduates are coming in to replace them.

Roughly half of Nova Scotia's nurses could retire within the next 15 years — and younger nurses are quitting in ever-increasing numbers because of worsening conditions and workload burnout, say reports by the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union, the Registered Nurses' Association of Nova Scotia, and the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union. And new graduates are also in short supply. In the last two years 25 percent of graduates left Nova Scotia as soon as they got out of school — many of them heading south of the border.

Kari Beaton, a second-year nursing student at Dal, is already looking seriously at the possibility of moving to the US when she graduates.

"There's better money in the states, nurses are more respected, and there's better benefit packages," she said.

Catherine Butler, a third-year nursing student and president of Dalhousie's nursing society, says a

lot of students have similar outlooks.

"It's hard to ignore the fact that the US is doing a lot of recruiting up here, and they have some pretty good incentives — permanent, full-time positions, [and] good salaries," she said.

In contrast, most of the jobs available to new graduates in Nova

job at the end of it."

Susan Charlton graduated from Dal's School of Nursing two years ago, and did casual work until just recently, when she was hired full-time at the Nova Scotia Hospital. She says by the time she finally got out of casual nursing, she was exhausted.

"It's not a good lifestyle, at least it wasn't for me," Charlton said.

"Being woken up at five in the morning to go work, not having a schedule, no

benefits, no paid vacation time... and you never feel part of the team, never really feel like you belong."

Charlton says she doesn't think being a casual nurse is something anyone should have to do for any length of time.

But Catherine Butler says the prospect of long-term casual work is one of the reasons Nova Scotia's young nurses are leaving in the first place.

"A lot of people who start off working here will be completely put off by the working conditions, and seek greener pastures elsewhere."

"Nurses have been predicting this situation for so long, and no one has paid any attention."

Henderson agrees.

"The shortage is real, the crisis is now, and lives are at risk."

**"The shortage is real, the crisis is now, and lives are at risk."**

Scotia, and throughout Canada, are casual positions: nurses work when they're needed, where they're needed, and forgo things like benefits and regular hours.

And the Registered Nurses Association of Nova Scotia says casual work is not the kind of job graduates are looking for.

"Casual nurses... might work five hours one week, fifty hours the next," said Patricia Bland, a spokesperson for the Registered Nurses' Association.

"That's very difficult for people with living expenses, and certainly with student loans."

Heather Henderson of the nurses' union agrees.

"If you're going to spend huge amounts of money on education, you want to know you have a steady



**SOUTHERN DRAIN:** If the current trend continues there won't be enough nurses wanting to stick you with sharp needles.

## PC youth boots out three members

### Mini political scandal over right-wing merger

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

Nova Scotia's Progressive Conservative youth association thinned its ranks and made national headlines last week when it expelled three members, including its president, after they attended February's United Alternative convention in Ottawa.

Many viewed the expulsions as an attempt to stifle political debate, and high-ranking members of the PC party, including federal leader Joe Clark and Nova Scotia leader John Hamm, drew criticism for their reluctance to condemn the expulsions.

The PC party does not support the United Alternative, a proposed right-wing alliance between the federal PC and Reform parties.

But after a week of controversy, the youth association sought to clarify its position, saying links drawn in the media between

the expulsion of their president and his attendance at the United Alternative convention were "erroneous."

Former president Paul Barnes' leadership was in question even before he attended the United Alternative convention, said interim president Brad Wells.

And Kevin Lacey and Clinton Desveaux — the two other Nova Scotia PC youth who attended the convention — weren't even kicked out, Wells said.

"We are not on a United Alternative witch-hunt, and we did not revoke any youth memberships based on attendance at the United Alternative."

The PC youth say the decision to revoke Barnes' membership was an internal matter.

As a result of the uproar Wells has asked the youth association's critics to lay off.

"Take a few deep breaths, calm down, and see our decision for what it was: the result of cumulative concern over our executive's leadership."

But Paul Barnes says he isn't buying it. The Acadia University student says the United Alternative has everything to do with why he was expelled.

"Whatever they're saying about me now is their way of deflecting criticism from a decision that has blown up in their face," he said.

He says one need look no further than the motion which revoked his membership for proof — it contains eight references to the United Alternative.

Barnes says he's disappointed the PC party has shown itself to be so closed to new ideas, and he says high-ranking Tories who failed to speak out against his expulsion are

equally to blame.

"This is a bad message to send to party members... putting partisan flag-waving ahead of principles."

And Kevin Lacey says his PC youth membership was revoked, despite the youth association's denial. He says like Barnes, it was because of the United Alternative.

Lacey, a student at Dalhousie University, says he's disappointed the association doesn't just accept

that they've made a political blunder.

"Rather than admit a mistake, they've concocted these stories," he said. "It doesn't make any sense."

In the meantime, Lacey has written to Joe Clark asking the PC leader whether people who attended the United Alternative convention are still welcome in the PC party.

Lacey has yet to receive a response.

"I guess he's mulling it over."

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