

WILL COVID-19 INSPIRE A NEW GENERATION OF NURSES?

'I ABSOLUTELY AM CONVINCED THAT THERE WILL BE A SURGE': RNAO CEO

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Brampton resident Parmeet Kahlon dreamed of being a nurse since she was a little girl.

With many family members working in health care, including her mother - a registered nurse - Kahlon was inspired.

"Being able to go with her to work and seeing all the amazing work that the nurses do, the personal support workers and all the people involved with caring for others, was very

inspiring and drew me to that similar path," she said.

Kahlon was completing her placement for her final year of school when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing her placement to stop for the time being.

But with her mother on the front lines, Kahlon is no stranger to the sacrifices nurses have been making every day since the onset of COVID-19. And she said it reinforces her choice to enter this career path.

"I'm very anxious to write my (licensing) exam and get back out in the field and just help out in any way I can," she added. "We always know about the resiliency of health-care workers, working all these long hours, but now you truly see the limits of what you can be pushed to as a

person and what you can really do."

Nancy Walton, director of the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing at Ryerson University, where Kahlon attended, said the school continues to receive an influx of applicants each year - and she doesn't expect that to change any time soon.

"A lot of people want to become nurses; it's a very attractive profession, in many ways. Because of the flexibility, because there's a lot you can do in terms of moving through a career in nursing and the fact that when you graduate after a four-year program, you enter a professional career. It's a very solid choice. And there's lots of need for it and always will be," she said.

Doris Grinspun, CEO of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO), said seeing nurses on the front lines in a variety of settings, from the ICU to long-term care, is sure to move the public and lead many individuals to consider a career in nursing.

"I absolutely am convinced that there will be a surge in the number of people who will want to become nurses," she said. "I think the government has learned good lessons on how nursing is central to managing a pandemic but also central in good times. I think we will see also a surge in opportunities for nurses to find more and more work in interesting areas of practice and important areas of practice."

Vicki McKenna, a registered nurse and president of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), said acknowledging and implementing more opportunities for nurses is crucial for future generations.



Bryon Johnson/Torstar
Parmeet Kahlon, a nursing student from Ryerson who has just graduated from her program, stands outside her home in Brampton.

She said while nursing is a desired profession, a lack of spaces in school programs and an absence of full-time work are two primary factors that influence nurse shortages in the province and across the country.

"I do believe that there will be people who are inspired to get into health care and to come into nursing, and for those who have a little fire lit about that, I'd like to say: please come, we need each and every one of you," she said.

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