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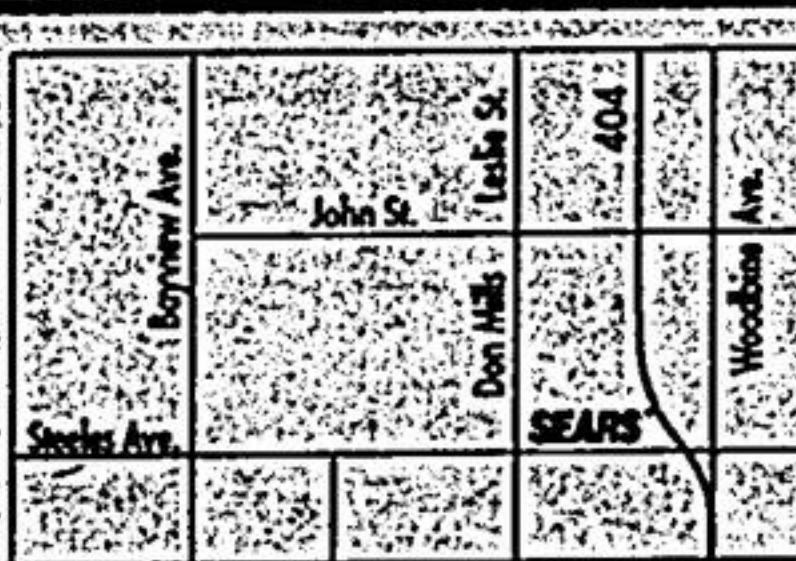
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Community care nurses are leaving in droves

From page 1.

a pediatric team and a mental health team," she explained.

"I have to make educated decisions on what to do. There may not be a doctor I can call on. I have myself to rely on."

And community care nurses often find themselves tending to patients society has largely forgotten — she says agencies have a tough time finding nurses willing to care for clients living in tough neighbourhoods.

And with community nurses being paid less than their hospital peers, LeGrice said that problem will only get worse as nurses leave the community sector to seek positions in hospitals or as middle managers in nursing agencies.

"Nurses are leaving the community in droves, it's an exodus. We had a team of 13 nurses, now we have six. We've lost a lot of really top people," LeGrice said. "We're saying we can't take any more patients."

Last year, the province announced it would hire 12,000 new nurses with an additional 650 full and part-time nurses to expand in-home nursing services, but LeGrice said she and her colleagues haven't benefited from any of that new money.

"I don't know where the money is. I heard it stopped at the front lines, but I haven't seen it," she said. "They keep talking about this being the way of the future, but they have to do something to make it more desirable to be in the profession — over half our staff are single moms."

"The money was supposed to go into frontline nursing, but we've never seen it in terms of any salary increases or new nursing positions," said LeGrice, who earns \$20.76 an hour. She says ski instructors make more than she does.

Nurses at hospitals across Ontario make between \$20.50 per hour to a maximum of \$30.24 for an RN with eight years experience. The updated wage was recently negotiated by the Ontario Nurses Association and is effective April 1.

Community Care Access Centre administrators say the money announced by the province was used to hire new nurses to help meet demand, but they agree the issue of wage parity is making things difficult.

"You can't have everybody in health care out-competing each other," said Bill Innes, executive director of the CCAC in York Region. "But it's a mistake to think money solves everything. It's an issue of there being enough people to satisfy demand."

However, Innes acknowledged the wage difference between hospital nurses and community



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Nurse Madge LeGrice has only herself to rely on at a patient's home.

nurses must be addressed.

"It would be nice to see them equalized, but I don't think it's right to compare what they do — they are two very different jobs and it's not a case, necessarily, of a nurse is a nurse is a nurse."

In the last couple of years, LeGrice said the provincial government has made it harder for her to do her job, knowing that an inequity exists in what she is paid compared to her peers at hospitals.

As a result, she is watching as her colleagues leave community nursing care for hospitals desperate to hire more RNs. Hospitals, she said, are viewed as attractive because they pay more, have ready access to physician back-up and regular hours with better working conditions.

"It has been brought to my attention by people within the field and I've raised it with the minister, who is aware of the disparity issue and has made a public commitment to address it," said Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees. "I expect you will see a plan to address it in the next couple of months."



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