

IN CONVERSATION WITH KERRY MORRISON, ANGELA WIGNALL, ADRIANE GEAR & LOUISE AERTS



 **Louise Aerts**
Acting Registrar and Chief Executive Officer
British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives



 **Kerry Morrison**
Provincial Chief Nursing Officer and Executive Director
Nursing Policy Secretariat
Ministry of Health



 **Angela Wignall**
Chief Executive Officer
Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia



 **Adriane Gear**
President
British Columbia Nurses' Union

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Article transcript below has been shortened for length. Close captioning options available within video.

Given the theme this year for Nurse's Week, which is the *Power of Nurses to Transform Health*, can each of you provide a B.C. example of where you see nurses transform health care?

 **Kerry:** Nurses transform health care every day at the micro, mezzo and macro level. I think about examples like professional responsibility processes to get workload on units, minimum nurse-to-patient ratios, quality improvement initiatives and research around how we can make bridging stronger and easier for nurses to advance their careers.

 **Louise:** In 2020, Dr. Bonnie Henry issued a provincial health order that temporarily allowed RNs and RPNs to diagnose and treat opioid use disorder as part of the provincial response to the opioid crisis. In 2023, we began working with the Ministry of Health, the former Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, BC Center on Substance Use, the Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia (NNPBC) and other system partners to develop a new certified practice designation. Under this new program, RNs and RPNs who become certified can autonomously diagnose and treat opioid use disorder, including prescribing controlled drugs such as methadone. Nurses with certified practice in opioid use disorder work across the system in remote and rural areas, clinics and urban settings to provide better access and equitable care. It's a great example of how skilled autonomous health care providers with an expanded scope can address challenges in the health care system and how nurses are transforming health care.

 **Angela:** When I think of this year's theme, I think of not only the work that nurses do to transform health systems, but really what the heart of nursing is, which is transforming individual human experiences and their lives. That is something we do every day across every setting. We often think about that in the clinical context. However, nurses work across many domains of practice. We have nurses in education who are creating the next generation of nurses and other health care providers.

IN CONVERSATION WITH KERRY MORRISON, ANGELA WIGNALL, ADRIANE GEAR & LOUISE AERTS - CONTINUED



We have nurses who are leading in research who are generating knowledge for health care systems, policy and for advocacy. We have nurses who are leaders like those of us having this conversation today, who are leading not only in health care systems, in titles that have the word “nurse” in them, but also in so many other sectors, bringing the full breadth of their nursing knowledge to the world in that leadership way.

We also must acknowledge the incredible work of Indigenous nurses in British Columbia, who are leading the ways in which Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are integrated into health care and communities as they care for their sovereign nations and their family groups. These nurses are transforming health not only at the bedside but across the full breadth of what it means to live in B.C., Canada and the world.

 **Adriane:** I believe that minimum nurse-to-patient ratios, once implemented, will fundamentally change health care. Not only will it ensure that nurses have quality practice environments, but in terms of improved patient outcomes, we want to ensure that our patients receive the best possible care. It's an example of advocacy that has taken place over twenty years. It is a nurse-led solution that is backed by the research and the evidence.

Another prime example of nurses transforming health care in B.C. is the pivotal role they played throughout the pandemic. I acknowledge each and every nurse that stepped up and led in that response. I had the privilege of working among these nurses during the pandemic with Island Health as part of the case contact and management process. What started out as a few desks became a very involved virtual response system. I felt and still feel very proud to have worked among those nurses during that time of uncertainty. Lastly, as I reflect on our collective agreement, nurses are leading the work to address racism and Indigenous-specific racism to redress the harms that have been caused and to build and repair relationships and trust within the system with our Indigenous communities - a prime example of how nurses are leading change.

What would you want your twelve year old self to know about nursing so that they would want to become a nurse and be excited about becoming a nurse?

 **Kerry:** I never thought I was going to be a nurse. Nursing was not even something my twelve year old self was aware of. What I would want my twelve year old self to know is that nursing is a phenomenal career. If you like being part of a team, nursing is the right career for you. If you like science and math and being logical, nursing is the career for you.

IN CONVERSATION WITH KERRY MORRISON, ANGELA WIGNALL, ADRIANE GEAR & LOUISE AERTS - CONTINUED

If you are artistic, kind and you like caring for and being with people, nursing is the career for you. If you don't like being with people, there is a place in nursing for you as well where you can work every day and never really have to talk to anybody. If you like computers and informatics and big data, there is a place in nursing for you. I think that's the part people don't always recognize is how big nursing is and how much opportunity there is to learn every day.

 **Louise:** There's a reason that nursing is consistently ranked one of the most trusted professions. People who choose this career really want to help others and they want to use their skills and their expertise. The fact that strangers count on you in a time of need is really impactful for people. Nurses work across many spectrums such as educators, clinical specialists, administrators, corrections and government roles, conducting research and providing home care - the career choices are endless. It's a profession that travels and has global opportunities to work around the world. When I think about my twelve year old self, there were so many careers that I didn't know about, including regulation. I just had that one image of that one type of nurse and now I see the endless possibilities.

 **Angela:** My twelve year old self would be surprised that I'm a nurse - nursing was not at the top of my twelve year old self's mind. That's not because I didn't think nursing was a good profession, it was simply because I didn't know much about nursing. I had a full career before becoming a nurse. Nursing was a mid-life career change for me. It is never too late to become a nurse. You don't have to be the nurse that graduates high school and goes directly into nursing school and is a registered nurse by the time they're twenty-two, although I love my colleagues who have taken that journey. You can be the mom with two infants at home with a ten year career in policy. I was a policy scientist, who suddenly discovered that I wanted to walk alongside child-bearing families and became a nurse in my early thirties and what a journey it was.

Nursing is there for us, it is a viable option no matter where we come from. I think it's one of the most welcoming and encompassing careers I could imagine for myself and I am fiercely proud to be a registered nurse. What I love about being a nurse is it has the space for all of who I am. I get to be an advocate, a policy scientist and to engage in the psychomotor and clinical skills that I find so deeply satisfying. You also get to be a systems leader and a change maker, and I can't think of any other career where the full breadth of who I am gets to exist every day and contribute meaningfully.



Nurses and
Nurse Practitioners
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Standing up for health care

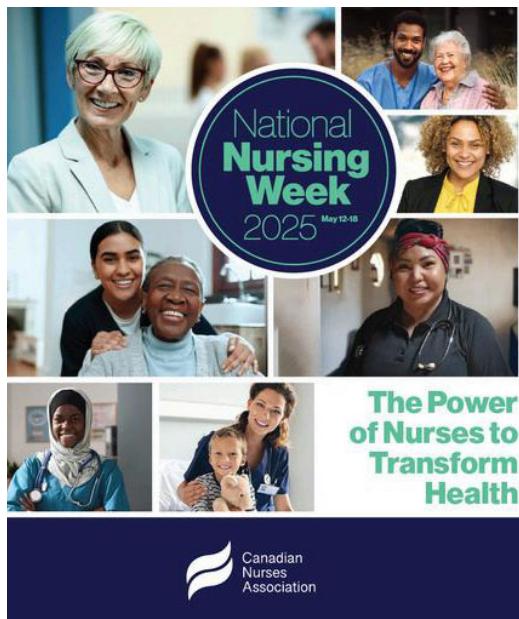


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IN CONVERSATION WITH KERRY MORRISON, ANGELA WIGNALL, ADRIANE GEAR & LOUISE AERTS - CONTINUED



I also think that my twelve year old self would be really proud of pursuing meaningful work that makes a difference for other human beings because that is the heart of all the work we do. When I cared for patients at the bedside, I was caring for that one person and their family. Today I feel like the health system is my patient and I'm doing the same caring work for the systems that keep us well across the province and the country. The heart of meaningful, endlessly interesting work is at the core of what I love about nursing.

A Adriane: My mother was a nurse so nursing was certainly on my radar but not first in mind when I was twelve years old. I knew I wanted to make an impact and I knew I wanted a career that involved serving others and making a difference, so nursing just made sense to me. I believe fundamentally that

being a part of someone's health journey is a privilege. In terms of the diversity of the different roles, my children say, "my mom is a nurse, and she cares for patients, but now she cares for nurses." For anyone that is considering nursing, I would say that there are so many amazing ways to have an impact, yet we need to acknowledge that right now is a very difficult time and the system is fractured and nurses have been carrying the burden of that; however, a moment that feels like forever, is still only a moment in time.

How can nurses support each other to continue to transform health care?

Kerry: Nurses support each other through appreciation for one another, recognizing the diversity in nursing and by not competing with each other. There is no perfect nurse, less-than perfect nurse or hierarchy of nursing. There is only nurses. If we are committed to lifting each other up and those colleagues around us that are not nurses like our allied health partners, especially when the system is fractured, we can grow closer together instead of further apart. I am grateful to be in this role at this time with these incredible provincial leaders. When we care for each other the way we care for our patients, there is nothing that can stop us.

Louise: Nurses are working together and supporting each other and transforming the system every day. I observe this within all our registrants - nurses really being advocates for patient-centered care. I see nurses who support each other to create stronger care teams. I see our partners collaborate on initiatives that are focusing on health equity, preventative care and community-based care models. Nurses are natural problem solvers. Collaborating on ideas to improve workflows and patient education can drive real change as well as celebrating the wins and successes. Nurses advocate, empower, mentor, knowledge-share, fostering a culture of respect and support one another's mental health and wellness. We know we have to be well in order to do our work well. Looking after each other and looking after ourselves is all a part of it.

IN CONVERSATION WITH KERRY MORRISON, ANGELA WIGNALL, ADRIANE GEAR & LOUISE AERTS - CONTINUED

 **Angela:** Its been a challenging time for nurses and it is not an easy time in health care. Being a human being right now is in and of itself challenging, let alone taking on the meaningful but sometimes burdensome work of caring for others in such a tangible way. When I think about how we can support each other and be well, I think transforming health care is recognizing that we're people with finite capacity to give. When our practice environments, employment models and systems that we work within don't allow us to be human, when they ask us to extend endlessly, work shift upon shift with no breaks and there is no opportunity to go to the washroom, nurses are overburdened. Those are not environments that center our capacity to give what we can.

We need to get behind our union partners and many others who are raising that alarm. It's essential to name the solutions to those challenges because we deserve to be well cared for at our place of work. When we believe in our power, we can transform. We can change what needs to be changed with the foundation of nursing knowledge to meaningfully contribute to the system. We are not in necessarily the curative arts, but we are in the caring for and walking alongside other people in their health journey and that is meaningful knowledge.

As autonomous self-regulating care providers, when we stand in that knowledge, when we stand in our power, there isn't anything that can stop us. I would encourage nurses to hold on to our shared humanity, to care for each other the way we care for patients. Speak up about our needs and stand behind those who are advocating for our needs, and be strong about the value of our contribution and the knowledge that we bring to the health care table.

Finally, I would say if we're at the policy table and that's our goal, we need to know what to do when we get there. Those of us who are in policy roles, let's cheer each other on and let's hold each other up so that we can make the changes that we know bring the full breadth and power of who we are to those tables.

 **Adriane:** I recognize not only our individual power and contributions as nurses, but that collective power. Within the union, there is more than 50,000 nurses. That is just the base that I represent and there is many more nurses beyond that. Nurses are bold and unite as a profession and are unapologetic. We are such amazing advocates for our patients and for our communities. We need to advocate for ourselves and do not deserve less than optimal working conditions because this directly impacts the care that patients receive. Standing up for ourselves will ultimately result in better care environments for our patients. I'm seeing the pressure really building in the workplace and I recognize that these are systems issues, and together we can address them.

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- Adriane Gear, President, British Columbia Nurses' Union