

# An adequate formation

*The debate over nursing education is one of the many variants in the challenge against Quebec's college system. Many thought the question had been put to rest with Minister Reid's Forum on the Future of College Education in 2004. Yet today, the frequent calling into question of study programs and the increasingly insidious attacks from all sides are making it tougher than ever to protect and defend the province's CEGEP system.*



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When the Act to amend the Professional Code and other legislative provisions in the field of mental health and human relations (Bill 21) came into force in 2009, it had the effect of de-certifying technical programs in social work, youth and adult correctional intervention, and special education. The latest assault against the DEC as an entry-level diploma into nursing is also based, in part, on this amendment to the Professional Code as well as on the one brought to the Quebec Nurses Act. Another dimension of the attack, particularly prevalent in this case, is the less than thorough comparison being drawn between the level of education required elsewhere in the world and college nursing training in Quebec.

In December 2012, Quebec Health and Social Services Minister Réjean Hébert created a task force to study and offer recommendations on basic training in nursing. In addition to Ministry representatives, the task force includes members from the union federations representing nurses (FIQ, FSQ-CSQ and

FSSS-CSN), Quebec's association of health and social services organizations (AQESSS), the conference of rectors and principals of Quebec universities (CRÉPUQ), the Federation of CEGEPs, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MESRST), the provincial Treasury Board and, lastly, the Quebec Order of Nurses (OIQ). The task force is slated to table its recommendations this spring.

## Perfectible tools for matching training with jobs

As of our appearance before the interdepartmental task force this past February 19 to present our position on the training of future nurses, not a single organization had raised the issue of inadequacy in training. In other words, no one had expressed any dissatisfaction with the job being done by college nursing graduates.

It is the view of FNEEQ-CSN that if any upgrade in college nursing training were to prove necessary, this should be done through the technical program review and revision process that has already been in practice in the system for many years.

This process<sup>1</sup>, which involves reviewing the situation in the labour market, has been fine-tuned over the last 40 years. Skill requirements are revised according to these updated analyses. Moreover, the labour market assessment sets minimum thresholds for entry into the profession based on what could normally be expected, both in terms of autonomy and efficiency, of a graduate starting

out in nursing practice. Thus, CEGEPs, like universities, have a mission to train future workers; neither one is capable of providing the kind of experience that can only come from practising the profession.

This profile of expected skills and minimum thresholds is developed after consulting with persons working in the field and with immediate technical support or administrative staff. Emphasis is also placed on ensuring these individuals hail from different sectors (types of establishments and clinical fields) as well as from different regions of Quebec.

It is this process that led, in 2000, to the first major program revision since the system's 1993 reform. After the creation of the CEGEP-university path and implementation of the Act to amend the Professional Code and other legislative provisions as regards the health sector (Bill 90), the program was modified province-wide to reflect the new requirements.

The college system has all of the means it needs to properly evaluate the matching of skills with jobs. However, the assessment of the labour market situation needs to be more transparent and include greater participation of teachers. As things currently stand, teachers are only brought into the assessment process as observers. While their presence is justified by their acknowledged expertise in their field and in teaching, in most cases they have no departmental, program or union representation.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports (2002). *Élaboration des programmes d'études professionnelles et techniques : Guide d'animation d'un atelier d'analyse de la situation de travail*, Quebec, MELS.

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Furthermore, it is our opinion that a provincial mechanism for consulting teachers from each technical program when that program is being developed or revised is essential to ensuring a more integrated approach to program teaching. This seems all the more important within the context of the debate now under way on nursing education.

### **The proposal for a post-DEC internship is an attack against all DEC holders**

Requiring that college nursing graduates complete an internship while pursuing their university studies would have the effect of transforming the technical training program into a non-certifying program, thereby opening no doors to the labour market and

essentially relegating it to the status of a pre-university program. The result in the medium term would be either a pre-university college education program whose only obvious outlet is university, or the outright disappearance of the technical training program in nursing. We could see some students move towards a pre-university DEC in natural sciences, which has different admission criteria than what is required for the nursing program. We are convinced that a good many candidates would be deterred by the prospect of entering the pre-university stream and that it would be a barrier for admissions to many.

And even if the technical program were to survive, there is no guarantee that the level of training of future practitioners would be what it is today. Indeed, with the technical program no longer leading to the possibility of licensing, there would likely be a restructuring in college training and a transfer of some competencies to the university sector, thereby resulting in a lower level of technical training for DEC graduates.

### **Training in the regions**

Lastly, one cannot ignore the difficulties that universities would face, particularly in some regions of Quebec, in trying to satisfy the conditions of the 36-month time limit for completion of a bachelor's degree demanded by the Quebec Order of Nurses (OIIQ) in its brief entitled *La relève infirmière du Québec : une profession, une formation (2012)*. A course offered only once a year would mean a full-year delay for a student who may be unable to register at the time due to family or professional reasons or who has failed the course and needs to retake it. Even the training leave for health care workers provided for in their collective agreements cannot assure training under all conditions, given that such leave is subject to labour shortage considerations. Not certifying technicians could therefore exacerbate this shortage and ultimately prevent attainment of the desired level of university training. ■

