



Photo Gilles Fréchette

## Revision of the *Nurses Act*

# A Profession United to Define its Future

The annual general meeting on October 29 was marked by a strong show of solidarity, as the delegates all expressed their support for the OIIQ's positions on the redefinition of the field of nursing practice, recognition for advanced practice and a new form of co-operation with nursing assistants.

A detailed presentation was given on the Order's May 2001 brief, entitled *La vision contemporaine de l'exercice infirmier au Québec* (a contemporary vision of nursing in Québec), followed by a discussion with delegates. All members received a summary of the brief in September. It is worth reviewing the Order's objectives here. The Order wants the *Nurses Act* to be modernized so as to remove any ambiguity regarding legally authorized clinical activities and, above all, to make sure it reflects contemporary nursing practices and encourages the development of the profession over the next ten or twenty years.

### Major issues

The issues involved in reviewing the fields of practice of the health professions are important: new activities will be regulated and others deregulated. In addition, some regulated activities will be allocated differently among the professions.

Everyone agrees that more sharing among the professions would be a good idea, as it would foster greater complementarity. Deciding what to share and how is an extremely sensitive matter, however. If too much is shared between two groups, it means that they are interchangeable, for all practical purposes. This kind of sub-

stitution is not desirable and can even be harmful to patients. Moreover, it would make the training programs at different levels meaningless.

When the Order made its submission to the departmental working group on the health professions and human relations (Bernier committee), we noted two points in dispute: our relations with physicians and with nursing assistants. Where physicians are concerned, the Collège des médecins is standing its ground: it will recognize advanced nursing practice only if a regulation is issued under the *Medical Act*. This position is unacceptable. While we do agree that methods of collaborating with physicians need to be regulated, our profession wishes to safeguard its acquired rights of self-management.

As for nursing assistants, they are rejecting the nursing prescription and the clinical authority held by nurses as stipulated in the current Act. In addition, the Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers auxiliaires du Québec would like to see a greater range of acts without conditions. The Bernier committee told us, in this respect, that it intended to recommend that nursing assistants be allowed to administer drugs without any restrictions. The OIIQ forcefully

argued that intravenous therapy is not simply a question of technique; it requires superior knowledge in pharmacology and assessment, supervision and monitoring skills. Intravenous therapy is a clinical activity at the heart of nursing practice, one with very serious risks for patients, and must be performed by a nurse.

As I write these lines, the conclusions of the Bernier committee are not yet known. I would remind you that a report does not have legal force. The ministers concerned, Paul Bégin and Rémy Trudel, will have to act prudently and conduct consultations on this report before they think of introducing legislation.

I still hope that the departmental working group, chaired by Dr. Bernier and largely composed of health-care establishment administrators, will be able to strike a balance between the vaunted flexibility so much desired in the organization of health care, on the one hand, and public protection on the other. If not, nurses will speak out loud and clear. 🗣️

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