

Temporary Foreign Workers in Nursing: Alberta and Manitoba Perspectives

October 19, 2010

Summary Report



Report on Symposium: Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in Nursing: Alberta and Manitoba Perspectives

The Work and Learning Network (WLN) for Research and Policy based at the University of Alberta organized the symposium, **“Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in Nursing: Alberta and Manitoba Perspectives.”**

Held on 19 October 2010, 10:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M., at the Edmonton Room of the Stanley Milner Public Library in Edmonton, Alberta, the symposium had a total of 54 attendees: policymakers, health professionals and practitioners, scholars, academics and graduate student-volunteers coming from governmental, health and educational institutions of Alberta.

In her introductory remarks, **WLN Director Dr. Alison Taylor** discussed the origins and objectives of the symposium. Aimed at understanding cross-provincial issues and addressing the challenges confronting temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in nursing beyond Alberta, the symposium served as a sequel to a series of earlier WLN events related to TFWs in Alberta.

The three-part symposium showcased the topic of TFWs in Alberta and Manitoba from the viewpoints of:

- 1) government politicians and department staff;
- 2) healthcare administrators; and
- 3) researchers.

WLN board member, Mr. Jason Foster, acted as moderator.

The first part of the symposium, “Provincial policies and practices related to TFWs” addressed:

- *each province’s role in relation to the immigration and certification processes of TFWs in health care;*
- *how temporary foreign workers fit into workforce planning for health care;*
- *the source countries and the number of TFWs recruited to the province;*
- *the number of TFWs that have become provincial nominees or permanent residents.*

Presentations by government representatives illustrated differences in recruitment policies and processes for TFWs in the two provinces.

Ms Teresa Woo-Paw, Parliamentary Assistant for Alberta Employment and Immigration, described how the program operates in Alberta, including the number of TFWs in the province, protections provided to them, and number of nominations to the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (leading to permanent residence). She also noted that a review of the TFW program is currently underway in the province; it will focus on how to improve the program for employers and workers, and how to keep the workers who are needed on a more permanent basis.

Ms Fanny Levy from the Government of Manitoba highlighted the importance of TFWs as part of regional immigration. She mentioned that her province developed the *Worker Recruitment and Protection Act* in 2009 to protect TFWs. Employers must register with the province to recruit internationally and must be approved before applying for a Labour Market Opinion (LMO). While Manitoba recruits significantly fewer TFWs, the province is more committed to ensuring that they have opportunities to become permanent residents.

The second part of the symposium, “TFWs in health care” addressed the following issues:

- *the health authorities’ role in recruiting internationally educated nurses (IENs);*
- *the changes health authorities have seen in the last five years, in terms of who has been recruited and from where;*
- *the process IENs follow to become licensed to practice in the province;*
- *the number of TFWs succeeding in working as Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs);*

Ms Karen Boros from Alberta Health Services, in discussing her experience with the TFW program, focused on the questions: What have we learned? And, how will we go forward? She admitted that the recession and restructuring of the health department affected the TFW initiative in Edmonton. Another issue that arose included differences in practice settings and language usage in countries of recruitment,¹ which affected the ability of TFWs to become licensed as RNs in Alberta. Finally, the need for communication with managers, unions, and the workforce to ensure the effective integration of TFWs was highlighted. In light of its experiences, Alberta Health Services has asked whether the TFW program is the best approach to addressing workforce needs; recruitment activities ceased in 2009 and there are no plans to continue this kind of international recruitment at present.

¹ In both provinces, most nursing recruits were from the Philippines.

Ms Larissa Kominko from the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority in Manitoba spoke of their TFW recruitment effort. In this case, unions and licensing bodies were actively involved in the recruitment and integration into the workplace of TFWs. Of the 122 nurses who wrote the Canadian Registered Nurses Examination (CRNE), 87% passed and all nurses who were offered employment have been retained. The question-and-answer part of the session focused on what the two provinces can learn from each other in terms of recruitment processes and settlement strategies for TFWs.

The third part of the symposium, “Research on TFWs” included researchers from the Work and Learning Network and a representative from the City of Brandon addressing the following issues:

- *how Alberta’s TFW program works in practice for nurses in terms of recruitment, assessment of qualifications, and licensure ;*
- *settlement experiences of transitional workers (TWs) in Manitoba;*
- *Manitoba’s efforts at retaining TWs amidst its changing demographics.*

Ms Sandy Trudel, an Economic Development Officer from Brandon, Manitoba discussed her city’s community approach to what they see as the recruitment and retention of transitional (not temporary foreign) workers.² Although a key employer in the community (Maple Leaf Foods) was influential in bringing workers, the city and community groups also played important roles. Areas addressed by the various stakeholders included housing, childcare, and settlement services for TFWs.

Mr. Jason Foster and Dr Alison Taylor from the Work and Learning Network presented preliminary findings from their interviews with different players involved in the TFW initiative in nursing in Edmonton. The topics discussed included the gap in expectations for TFWs, frustrations involved in the licensure process, and challenges in maintaining employment, and communication gaps. In the question-and-answer part of the session, the audience asked about other research on TFWs and the factors that affect them.

In her concluding remarks, co-director of the Prairie Metropolis Centre and professor of Nursing at the University of Alberta **Dr. Linda Diane Ogilvie** raised some of the broader ethical issues around the TFW program including the impact on home countries’ (e.g. the Philippines) labour markets and the impact on families of TFWs in their home countries. In addition, research on what is needed for internationally educated nurses to succeed in licensure processes can inform some of the questions raised by the symposium.

² The City of Brandon uses the term ‘transitional’ to indicate their commitment to facilitating the process of making these workers permanent residents of the community.