

**A Brief History of the  
College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba  
A companion document to “A Summary of Psychiatric Nursing  
Education in Manitoba”  
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In 1918, Clarke and Hincks had been invited by the provincial government to do an evaluation of the mental hospitals in Manitoba. They found appalling conditions and were very concerned with the lack of trained staff. As a result, in 1919 the first provincial psychiatrist was appointed and, in 1920 and 1921, training programs were started in Brandon and Selkirk to train staff. These were the first psychiatric nurses. A similar program began in Portage la Prairie in 1935.

In 1951, the founding meeting of the Canadian Council of Psychiatric Nurses was held. BC, Alta and Sask all had obtained legislation by then. Art Russell and Alf Barnett attended as observers from Manitoba.

In 1958, Art Russell organized a meeting of Psychiatric Nurses from Brandon and encouraged the groups in Portage and Selkirk to do the same. By 1959, they were organized well enough to seek legislation and, on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1960, the Psychiatric Nurses Act was proclaimed.

Although psychiatric nurses existed in Manitoba before 1960, it was in that year that we gained some formal recognition through the proclamation of the Psychiatric Nurses Association Act. The Association was run by volunteers except for one part-time registrar who was located in Brandon. There were initially three "branches" of the Association: Brandon, Portage la Prairie and Selkirk. This of course reflected where the overwhelming majority of psychiatric nurses were employed at the time. In 1963, the word "registered" was added to the title of the psychiatric nurse and the Association. It became the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Manitoba (RPNAM). By 1968 there was an active branch of the Association in Winnipeg called the Metro branch. The Board of Directors/Council was formed of 5 persons from each of the four branches. There was a President and three Vice-Presidents who were elected by the board from each of the three branches not represented by the President.

In 1971, the Association hired its first staff person, an administrative secretary and rented its first office space on the second floor of a building on Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg. In 1976, the Manitoba Association of Registered Nurses (MARN) published "Nursing Education: Challenge and Change", a document that recommended the elimination of psychiatric nursing as a separate group. The RPNAM mobilized its volunteer resources and prepared a submission to the O'Sullivan Task Force on Nursing Education. That Task Force recommended maintaining psychiatric nursing as a separate group. The issues facing the profession were becoming more and more complex so the Association hired its first Executive Director and there were two staff persons working for the RPNAM, now located on the main floor of the same building on Notre Dame Avenue.

In 1980, there were very significant changes for the Association. Over the years, the Association had accumulated a good reserve of funds and it was the dream of Past-President John Martyniw that, as well as having access to baccalaureate education, the profession of Psychiatric Nursing in Manitoba should also own its own building. John had even had architectural plans drafted for the building. In spite of arguments that the location of the "provincial office" should be located in Brandon or in Portage la Prairie, the decision of the Council at the time was to purchase a building in Winnipeg. On December 8, 1980, the RPNAM offices moved into the building at 1854 Portage Avenue. The Association inherited two tenants with the purchase of the building and this assisted in offsetting occupation costs. During the 1989 Annual Meeting, the mortgage was ceremonially burnt! The Association/College has continued to have tenants in the building to offset operational costs.

Also in 1980, the RPNAM hired its first education director, a position that would eventually lead to that of Practice Consultant. We also hired a secretary to add to the support provided by the administrative assistant who worked on both registration and finance. In effect, the Association doubled its staff complement in 1980. This was due mostly to the new legislation that was proclaimed in 1980: *The Registered Psychiatric Nurses Act*. The emphasis now was on protecting the public. Pursuant to the new Act, the RPNAM took on several new responsibilities in relation to registration, examinations, a full disciplinary process and the approval of psychiatric nursing education programs. We were finally taking on the responsibilities associated with being a "profession". The council became a board of Directors.

The 1980 legislation also changed the composition and size of the board of directors and the way it was elected. The board's composition was now 2/3 RPNs and 1/3 public representatives. The board of directors was 24 with 18 RPNs and 6 public representatives. Three RPNs were appointed from each branch for a total of 12. Six RPNs were elected at large at the annual meeting for a total of 18 RPNs. Then, the board appointed three public representatives and so did the minister of Health. By 1989, each branch appointed one representative only and 8 other RPNs were elected at large at the annual meeting. There were also 4 public representatives appointed.

At the 1982 Annual General Meeting, the President and the Executive Director reported on the development of new processes for registration and for the disciplinary process. There had also been work on the development of registration examinations. The RPNAM was concerned about the needs of the people of Manitoba; how to meet those needs; and how to educate psychiatric nurses to meet those needs. A committee was struck to prepare a proposal for baccalaureate education for RPNs.

During 1983, the RPNAM was involved with the other provincial associations in the development of an alternative to

the structure of the Psychiatric Nurses Association of Canada. A motion at the AGM called for the RPNAM to give urgent attention to validating competencies and assessing graduate performance against competencies and Standards.

From 1985 to 1986 much energy was spent in addressing the closure of the School of Psychiatric Nursing in Portage la Prairie and in the development of a post-diploma baccalaureate program for RPNs. The 1987 annual meeting was held at the Birchwood Inn in Winnipeg and all those staying at the hotel were woken at around 3:00 AM by the fire bell. The hotel was evacuated because of a garage fire. A restaurant across Portage Avenue opened its doors for us and we talk about this adventure to this day. No one was hurt but a board member's car suffered. The 1988 Annual Meeting was held in Portage la Prairie and the report on The Future of Psychiatric Nursing recommended that the RPNAM ensure that all its statements and policies reflect the profession as unique and separate from any other group; that the RPNAM provide leadership for the expansion of the role for the RPN in all practice settings; that the RPNAM promote the development of the leadership potential of individual RPNs; that the RPNAM continue to provide leadership to ensure that basic psychiatric nursing education programs and continuing education programs are contemporary and forward looking; and, that the RPNAM increase the public profile of the Profession.

The 1989 meeting in Brandon featured the release of the Third Stage report on the Future of Psychiatric Nursing by Mike Thompson and the release of a national statement on baccalaureate education. The 1990 Annual Meeting was held in Selkirk and the Psychiatric Nursing Working Group interim report was presented. At that meeting, chaired by Jeff Gunter, a motion was passed that asked for a statement of position on entry to practice. The 1991 Annual Meeting in Winnipeg was focused on the announcement of the closure of the School of Psychiatric Nursing in Selkirk. Students and faculty had staged protests at the legislature. Two major reports were presented: the final report of the Psychiatric Nursing Working Group was presented by Marlene Fitzsimmons and a commissioned study on the issue of baccalaureate education for the profession was presented by David Pascoe. The main motions presented at that meeting included that the strategic impetus for the board for 91/92 be primarily focused on the formation of education strategies that meet the current and future educational needs of RPN practice. At that meeting, the board received a letter from the Minister of Health expressing commitment to baccalaureate education and expanded roles for Registered Psychiatric Nurses.

At the 1992 Annual meeting in Portage la Prairie, a presentation was made on the Psychiatric Nursing Education Feasibility Study, a \$450,000, two-year Health Services Development Fund Project. This project had three main goals: 1. the development of a process to assist RPNs with the changes that would be required in their practice following the closure of the Brandon Mental Health Centre; 2. a province-wide needs assessment for mental health services by RPNs; and 3. the development of a proposal for a baccalaureate program in psychiatric nursing. At the 1993 annual meeting held in Brandon, the RPNAM decided to review its branch structure.

The 1994 meeting was in Selkirk and the highlight was the presentation of the Summary of the Final Report of the Psychiatric Nursing Education Feasibility Study. Following the receipt of that report, RPNAM resources were mobilized to ensure that the recommendation of a baccalaureate program in psychiatric nursing would be implemented. There were still no definite news for the 1995 Annual Meeting but the Bachelor of Science in Mental Health was implemented beginning in September 1995.

In 1998, the President and the Executive Director attended the convocation ceremony for the first graduating class with a BScPN. In 1999, the members approved a revised Code of Ethics. At the 2000 annual meeting in Brandon, the Executive Director announced the hiring of a Practice Consultant on a half-time basis to develop the Continuing Competence Program. During that year, the RPNAM became the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM).

In 2002 the annual meeting was held in Winnipeg and the assembly received the first report from the Continuing Competence Committee. At the 2003 annual meeting, the assembly received a report on the preparations for the 2004 RPNC World Congress being hosted by the CRPNM. The Congress was very successful. At the 2005 annual meeting, the chair noted that this was the 85<sup>th</sup> year of psychiatric nursing education in Manitoba and Canada. At the 2006 annual meeting, it was announced that the Government of Manitoba was developing omnibus legislation for all regulated health professions in the province. In 2007, the assembly received a report on the National Code of Ethics and Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice that was in the process of development. The 2009 Annual Meeting and Conference was held in Selkirk and highlighted emerging roles for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in the Province.