

N.B. nurses report highest burnout rate in Canada

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Stephanie Maillet, professor of business and human resources at Université de Moncton, and Kate Sheppard, the senior adviser for education and practice at the Nurses Association of N.B., are shown.

Photo: Vanja Lakic/Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • New Brunswick nurses reported the highest rate of compassion fatigue in Canada, Université de Moncton research shows.

Stéphanie Maillet, a business and human resources professor who led the study using sample populations from all provinces, said she believes several factors put New Brunswick in first spot, including its high nurse shortage, high patient acuity (intensity of care required) and insufficient resources.

"The work environment is very difficult for nurses in New Brunswick, given the factors that are contributing to that in population, the work environment and the complexity," Maillet said. "Nurses are trying to manage

giving quality care with a lack of resources."

Compassion fatigue refers to the indifference to another's suffering caused by the frequency in exposure to such cases.

Health-care professionals who are emotionally and physically exhausted, and morally disengaged have a deleterious effect on patient safety, the New Brunswick Nurses Union wrote in a news release.

Jordan Speight, 32, who has suffered from depression since high school, brought "the attitudes of front-line workers such as mobile mental health nurses" to the attention of Health Minister Victor Boudreau last year.

Speight said some of the "front-line workers seem overworked and tired and have a very uncaring attitude."

The number of registered nurses in New Brunswick has steadily decreased since 2012, data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicates. About 41 per cent of registered nurses are 50 years of age and over, while 12 per cent are under 29, according to 2016 figures provided by the Nurses Association of New Brunswick.

Nursing's low entree rate combined with a high volume of practitioners nearing retirement age, and New Brunswick's aging demographic, puts the industry into a precarious situation.

In addition, the province has one of the highest rates of obesity, smoking and chronic illnesses in Canada, Statistics Canada figures show, which Maillet believes contributes to the high rate of burnout with nurses in her study.

Some common signs that point to disengaged health-care professionals include lack of focus, forgetfulness, dismissive behaviour and anxiety, Maillet said.

More health-care dollars and a greater supply of nurses would help to alleviate patient overload that contributes to compassion fatigue, Maillet said.

But individuals suffering from the condition need to start with self-care, she said.

This means proper exercise, nutrition, relaxation, stress management and ample options to seek professional help.

"It's important to have workshops to address and start talking about compassion fatigue, given there's a shortage and we want nurses to stay and we want new recruits," said Kate Sheppard, senior advisor for education and practice at the Nurses Association of New Brunswick.

The union and the nurses association hosted its first compassion fatigue workshop last year. A similar event was held in Saint John on Tuesday and more are scheduled to take place in Moncton and Edmunston this year.

"It's definitely a concern worth addressing," said Jennifer Whitehead, an employee at the nurses association. "Tools are needed to correct it or actively get ahead of it."

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