

CANADA

# peopleCare being proactive in human resources as they ready for growth

According to the Canadian Press, Ontario will need 33,200 more nurses and 50,853 more personal support workers by 2032.

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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According to the Canadian Press, Ontario will need 33,200 more nurses and 50,853 more personal support workers by 2032.

If those numbers aren't scary enough, the Ontario Long-Term Care Association (OLTCA) said that by 2029, the province's long-term care homes will require at least 58,600 more nurses and personal support workers. Those huge increases are needed to meet increased hours of care and support for residents with an increase in beds across the province.

Either way you look at it, the health-care system, already stretched when it comes to human-resources challenges, faces an uphill battle to staff homes and provide care to some of the most vulnerable members of society.

Despite the overwhelming statistics, one long-term care provider with deep roots in Tavistock is confident they will be able to meet the growing need for health-care staff. peopleCare is building a new home in the town behind the current facility, a project that will see a 100-bed home grow to 128 beds. With that, comes an increase in staffing needs.

“With the addition of 28 new beds, we need to hire over 40 new staff. Mainly registered practical nurses and personal support workers but also dietary, housekeeping and laundry,” said the home's executive director, Deb Wettlaufer.

The home is actively recruiting and Wettlaufer sells the small-town charm to prospective employees.

“Tavistock is such a nice place to live in and work in. It’s a small, quiet community. We’re always reaching out to students and others who haven’t experienced it to share how rewarding it is to be in long-term care and care for seniors.”

Wettlaufer has put in 40 years at the company’s Tavistock location and mentioned EZTransit, a pilot program that started in January as another recruitment tool. It offers free transportation from Tavistock to Woodstock, but it is only committed to run until the end of May when East Zorra-Tavistock council will decide whether to continue it. The home also expects 20 internationally educated nurses (IENs) to join the team in Tavistock sometime in August.

“When the new peopleCare Tavistock home opens later this fall, we will be 100 per cent ready with the team of engaged, skilled and caring people we need to meet our residents’ needs,” she added.

The Gazette asked peopleCare if there is more the provincial and federal governments could be doing to help with the staggering numbers of skilled workers needed in the sector. Sheena Campbell is the company’s vice president of communications and engagement and said she gives the province credit for the continued investments to help alleviate staffing issues such as funding for education, training and enhancing student-clinical placements.

“We’ve been advocating with the federal government for immigration pathways in relation to IENs and displaced healthcare workers in refugee circumstances, for example, to make it easier to register in Canada. We’re also exploring with our provincial partners how to better support IENs to get their registration and classification in Ontario quicker.”

Jeremy Zinger is peopleCare’s vice president of long-term care operations and he sits on the Ontario Long Term Care Association’s (OLTCA) human resources taskforce. He explained the company has been taking a proactive approach.

“The fact that we have health human-resource challenges happening across Canada and around the world is well known. peopleCare is committed to creating innovative staffing solutions that build and enhance the pool of skilled and caring health-care workforce in collaboration with government and other partners.”

He added the company is working to maximize all avenues to recruit new staff immediately, build a future pipeline of talent and create sustainable retention solutions for our existing and new Homes. They have also established a decided HR recruitment specialist role in each home.

“They manage the day-to-day tasks and work with the team to implement strategies, with a strong focus on attracting and hiring students, academic and immigration partnerships that build capacity upstream, and an enhanced employee engagement strategy.”

peopleCare has put resources into bringing IENs to Ontario as they are building new homes and redeveloping existing ones.

“All our new homes we intend to bring in highly skilled, experienced internationally educated nurses. They work as PSWs in our homes for two years while we support them to get their credentials to practice as nurses in Ontario,” said Jenn Killing, the company’s vice president of quality, research and strategic partnerships.

Killing, a Tavistock resident, said with the company’s growing number of long-term care beds they have to focus closely on recruitment.

“When we looked ahead to opening more new homes in a short timeframe, we knew we had to maximize all avenues to recruit new staff immediately, build a future pipeline of talent and create sustainable retention solutions for our existing and new homes.”

The new peopleCare Tavistock home is expected to welcome residents by mid-fall.

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