

Dear Editor:

Recent news of contract negotiations between Grey Bruce Health Unit and the public health nurses has motivated me to respond to the frequently asked question, "What is a public health nurse?"

Unlike the very visible bedside nurses at hospitals, much of the work in public health remains behind the scenes. Public health nurses strive to identify potential health risks and prevent the potential from becoming a real risk, much like the old adage, "a stitch in time, saves nine." Prevention comes in many forms. In Grey and Bruce counties, assisting new mothers prevents health problems with babies, immunization prevents disease, identifying disease outbreaks prevents rapid and uncontrolled spread of disease, educational campaigns raise awareness of potential health risks (think of the smoking by-laws, car seat safety, alcohol and drug use, sun safety). To accomplish the goal of keeping our communities healthy, public health nurses rely on people within our communities, so partnerships or coalitions are formed. Nurses motivate people to do what they can to stay healthy.

Public health nurses have been called the "public's safety net." Potential problems are identified, education and skills are used to weave the net, so that when crises do arise, you can be protected and our communities can return to health.

LeAnn White R.N.

President, Grey Bruce Chapter

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario