



Presidents Report ACEN 2010 AGM

As I reflect on my time as your president, let me begin by thanking the executive and membership for the honour and privilege of serving in this role. ACEN represents outstanding, passionate and courageous nursing leaders from coast to coast, and it is often in these times of great challenge, that we rise to the occasion and do our best work. I am proud to be counted among its membership and it has been a wonderful learning experience for me personally and professionally. I have gained much from working so closely with many of you over this past year.

I believe that 2009 has been one of our most difficult years in a very long time. Externally, the turbulence seen in 2008 flowed right into the New Year. Not only did we have to contend with the impact of the H1N1 pandemic, and skill mix/model of care challenges, but the economy continued steadily on its downward trajectory, impacting health care organizations across the country. Key nursing leadership positions at many levels of our organizations continued to disappear as regionalization and cut backs evolved – literally travel budgets, conference dollars, and membership fees disappeared overnight. This impacted on the ease of our ability to come together on a more regular basis to discuss emerging trends in our Provinces, and to support each other during this difficult time. Internally, ACEN has continued its search for a permanent Executive Director, while focusing on the completion of all the requirements of incorporation, which had begun in the past several years, including a revision of our by-laws. I am forever thankful to Heather Mass, who continued in her role of interim Executive Director (ED), long past her commitment date, to keep ACEN stabilized and moving forward. Recruitment for a permanent ED has proved a bigger challenge than anticipated, and much time was spent earlier in 2008 by the Executive Committee, recruiting and vetting potential candidates. Although we had some very promising leads, to date, we have not been successful in filling this position permanently. Thankfully, when Heather stepped down from the role to meet other commitments at the end of the summer, Nan Brooks agreed to support ACEN in the interim ED position until the new fiscal year. The handoff went extremely well, and Nan has brought new energy and creativity to the Executive Committee.

Despite these challenges, ACEN continued to address its **three strategic directions** and underlying goals:

1. **The Health of Canadians:** Through its strategic coalitions and partnerships, ACEN influences and participates in setting directions for nursing, health policy and health care delivery in Canada that improve the health of Canadians.
2. **The Advancement of Nursing:** ACEN leads a community of practice to share, discuss, and debate strategies and innovations that advance nursing clinical practice, education, research and management.
3. **Leadership in Health Care Delivery:** ACEN supports the development of current and emerging executive nurse leaders across Canada.

This past year, ACEN addressed these goals in a variety of ways, while continuing to shore up its infrastructure. First of all, as many organizations imposed restrictions on corporate memberships, this understandably impacted on the sustainability of our own membership, and thus, our budget. The Executive viewed this as an opportunity for innovative measures. We have thought long and hard about the value proposition of our core purpose, structures and ideas. However, before developing strategies to address this situation, the Executive elected to enhance awareness of ACEN as an organization among non-members and to clarify the expectations of membership among both existing and potential members. In March, 2009, with the support of funds from the Health Canada Office of Nursing Policy, the Janet Davies Group was contracted to review the findings from the



2007 ACEN survey and to interview current, non-renewing and potential ACEN members with regard to these issues. The findings from this survey have been utilized to support a concerted effort to retain current members, attract past members to recommit, and attract new members among nurses who are (or are poised to become) executive nurses and senior leaders in education, research, and policy making. The full findings of this review were published in a Fall issue of *The Journal of Canadian Nursing Leadership*, and have formed the basis of much of our discussion together at this year's annual meeting.

As well, ACEN conducted a very successful "Cross Country Check-Up Teleconference" in December 2009. Representatives from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia provided updates on key issues impacting their regions, followed by a question period and open discussion. It was wonderful to have so many members participate and we plan to continue this type of venue on an ongoing basis. ACEN is also leveraging technology to bring its membership together in new and innovative ways. ACEN now has a Facebook Group to support social networking, and we are utilizing web-based technology to bring our Pan-Canadian membership together virtually for our conference this year. Finally, ACEN is exploring new and innovative partnerships with organizations and associations (i.e. The Canadian Nursing Association, Longwoods), that can provide synergistic energy to spark creativity and leverage each other's strengths, in order to best support for our membership in meeting our strategic directions.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Executive Committee: Nan Brooks, Sue Coke, Diane Larivee, Noreen Linton, Mary Ferguson-Pare, along with all of the committee members from the Leadership, Governance and Membership, Policy, Finance, and Editorial Advisory Committees, for their outstanding work and tireless commitment to ACEN, often juggling busy schedules and horrific workloads to move our agenda forward. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Jody Layer, our administrative assistant. Jody has provided outstanding support to the Executive and membership throughout this year, and especially during the transition of interim executive directors.

As my time as President of ACEN draws to a close, I encourage each and every one of us to strive to find new and creative ways to support ACEN and continue to move its important agenda forward. In times of adversity and difficulty, we can react in one of two ways: we can either lose hope, falling into despair and apathy, or we can use this challenge to find our inner strength and courage. We need to redirect our time and energy away from a kind of horizontal thinking, where we find ourselves moving along only the surface of things. These are times when we must sometimes stop and sit still. If we listen intently, breezes from a whole other world will begin to whisper to us. New energy and creativity will find us. I love the words of Robert M. Pirsig, who said "to live only for some future goal is shallow. It's the sides of the mountain that sustain life, not the top". Let us continue together up the mountain, harnessing the learnings from each of our respective organizations, perspectives and geographical locations to strengthen our cause and our resolve as we live and work on the sides of the mountain. Be assured that our individual and collective voices rise up in a loud chorus toward the summit, as we speak the truth, challenge and push against the status quo and drive deep change into our health care system.

Respectfully Submitted by Joy Richards, RN, PhD