

## ***Our Duty of Care – Recommendation 8***

### **RESEARCH & RESEARCH TRAINING FOR NURSING**

#### **What is this project about?**

Recommendation 8 b) focuses on the future viability of nursing and midwifery research in Australia. How can we assure that not only is evidence found and applied for best practice, but also that nursing and midwifery makes a significant research contribution to the health care system and the health of the Australian people within the current context of research in Australia?

As part of the process of addressing the issues identified in recommendation 8 b) a series of forums /focus groups were held in each jurisdiction. In addition a literature search has been undertaken and efforts made to capture a snapshot of nursing and midwifery research currently.

#### **Consultation**

From the participants at the forums/focus groups, some strong messages emerged.

The following two areas were clearly **rejected** by the majority of the participants:

- A separate set of nursing and midwifery priority areas in research. The existing government National Research Priorities and the National Health Research Priorities were considered sufficient to accommodate much of nursing and midwifery research. It was advocated that nursing and midwifery researchers need to work within these government priorities, and also to ensure that they become more strategically placed to have an influence on the directions that the Government takes in research.
- A dedicated pool of funding to provide research grant money (Recommendation 8 (b)). Forum participants pointed out that many nursing and midwifery researchers have been successful in accessing competitive national research funding. The view was put strongly that if nursing and midwifery is to be a strong force in the future, then its researchers must compete successfully on the same terms as other disciplines.

There were a number of areas that emerged as **priorities** by forum participants in order to ensure the future development of a strong nursing and midwifery profile. These included the following:

- **Integration of research findings into practice.** The impact of nursing and midwifery research needs to be translated into practice, so that service delivery can be improved and the health of Australians benefit maximally. For this to occur, attention needs to focus on the research culture not only in the clinical area, but also in academia. Examples of strategies that had worked in building a positive research culture were given at the forums and these and other areas have been supported from the literature. Some clear strategic directions were provided – strategies that require an all of nursing and midwifery approach.
- **Building the longer-term research capacity.** If nursing and midwifery research is to become stronger, then its longer-term capacity must be built now. Initially, this requires the development of a **critical mass of researchers** in particular research areas. Within a critical mass, expert researchers work together and gather around them a team of new and trainee researchers. Central to the establishment of “expert” status is the development of a research “track record”. A critical mass tends to develop more rapidly if the researchers work within programs of research, where the focus is on a particular area of research that is addressed in both breadth and depth. Within the development of a critical mass, the onus is to not only “grow” new researchers, but to enable novice researchers to build their own track records. In this way the longer-term capacity builds. From the forums, discussion with expert researchers and the literature, there are many strategies that nursing and midwifery can employ to build a critical mass, develop track records and achieve “expert’ status.
- **Getting smarter about being successful in accessing research funding.** Effective research cannot be undertaken without adequate funding. Nursing and midwifery researchers have a history of being successful in accessing a wide variety of funding sources. However, in terms of longer-term capacity, the most effective sources are the competitive national research grants such as ARC and NHMRC. Many suggestions were made by forum participants and from these, and discussions with expert researchers, and the literature a number of strategies emerge that ensure a “smarter” approach to acquiring funding.

In addition to these priorities, a strong message from the consultation was the urgent need for a mechanism for a more **co-ordinated national approach** to nursing and midwifery research. Questions discussed included the role of Centres, the use of a leadership group, either an existing group, or a new group that could show the leadership necessary to co-ordinate nursing and midwifery research and to be a strong voice for nursing and midwifery research to government and other key stakeholders. Suggestions were made as to how this notion can be progressed.

## Current state of nursing and midwifery research in Australia

There are still units whose funded research output is either minimal or nonexistent. These units appear to lack strong research leadership and university support. They have some way to go to reach a level where they can make a substantial and sustained contribution to nursing and midwifery research.

Thus, currently there is considerable strength in nursing and midwifery research, and there is potential for improvement. However, for those at the lower levels, strong leadership is required and support from other areas of the nursing and midwifery profession, despite the competitive environment in which research is undertaken. There are questions about the longer term capacity of nursing and midwifery research that need to be addressed nationally, in a coordinated manner, if nursing and midwifery research is to reach its full potential in contributing at a substantial level to the health of Australia.

In order to ascertain the current state of play in nursing and midwifery research, in addition to the information provided from the consultation, a search has been undertaken of university and other research areas. This snapshot that emerges indicates at least four different level of nursing and midwifery research.

- There are a number of strong research groups that are focussing on particular areas of research, and have built up a critical mass of expert researchers, and are strategically placed to ensure that they are well funded for future research and to grown new researchers. The strengths of these groups lie in the partnerships and collaborations that they have established, within and outside nursing, locally, nationally and internationally and their ability to work within the directions set by Government for Australian research. These "high flyers" have set standards and employed strategies that have ensured their current longer-term capacity and auger well for the future.
- A number of groups are in the process of building up their research reputation. They have a number of funded projects, most within research programs or areas of perceived strength. However, they have not yet reached the level of being regular recipients of the more prestigious funding grants. It could be anticipated that these groups will reach the "high flyer" level if they continue on their present trajectory, especially where research leadership is strong.
- At the third level are those research units whose research output appears to be low at this stage. This includes a number of units that are currently undergoing change in research leadership. It could be anticipated that with support from their universities these groups have the potential to move forward rapidly.

<b>Taskforce Role</b>	Taskforce to implement	<b>Commencement of Work</b>	JUNE 2004
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