

SPECIALISATION

Progress Update 2006

The work on specialisation is currently being progressed in a number of stages. The following is a summary of the activities currently underway.

1. The language of specialisation and advanced practice As discussed in the Scope of Practice Commentary Paper, the language used in relation to nursing and midwifery practice is often ambiguous or contradictory. In particular the language of specialisation is intertwined with notions of advanced practice and there are many agenda that are reflected in both what terms are used and how they are used.

At this point in time, when work is progressing all across Australia on issues such as Decisions Making Frameworks, "advanced" roles for enrolled nurses and the implementation of NP, it is vitally important that nurses and midwives start to sensitise themselves to the language and its significance.

The Taskforce has asked Dr Marie Heartfield to write a paper to highlight some of the issues and implications of using certain language. This paper is currently being finalised and will be available on this website at the end of February. The purpose of the paper is not to propose definitions or to prescribe the meaning of such terms but rather it is intended to prompt readers to think about the way we use the language and what might be the outcomes.

2. Specialisation Framework

Further to the work of implementing recommendations from National Review of Nursing Education 2002: Our Duty of Care, Health Ministers referred issues relating to speciality nursing education in Australia to the National Nursing and Nursing Education Taskforce.

This work is closely associated with a recommendation from The Critical Care Nurse Workforce in Australia 2001-2011. AHWAC Report 2002.1, Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee that "AHMAC note the desirability of a move towards greater consistency in postgraduate critical care courses and the development of a framework for accreditation for postgraduate critical care courses." (Recommendation 2).

It is the view of the Taskforce that these two recommendations should be progressed together. Accordingly, a project to deliver the following is being implemented:

an agreed definition of specialist nursing

an agreed framework for nursing specialisation and for the development and attainment of post graduate qualifications that will be transferable to any postgraduate specialty nursing course (including critical care) and which describes principals for the provision of postgraduate courses.

Workplan for this includes a number of activities, but foundational to this is the production of a taxonomy of recognised nursing specialties & criteria for a recognised speciality.

As part of the Review a considerable body of work was done by Ogle et al, namely Nursing Education and Graduates Part 1 & 2. This included modifying work done by Russell et al for the National Review of Nurse Education (1997) on a classification of nursing specialties for the purpose of categorising nursing education. The Ogle team updated the work to reflect current trends and nursing education course nomenclature.

This work therefore is appropriate as the basis for a national framework for nurse specialisation with some minor updating and the addition of a clear set of criteria for inclusion as a speciality. Accordingly, the Taskforce has asked the team at Deakin University to:

Review and revise classification of nursing and midwifery specialties and to propose a national framework.

To develop criteria for a recognised nursing and midwifery speciality.

To map the proposed classification against key data collections that use specialisations nomenclature such as DEWR shortage data, ABS classifications, workforce planning data and prepare report on the degree of concordance with the proposed framework.

3. Governance standards for nursing and midwifery organisations Nursing educational preparation is based on principles of outcome-based education, where competency is assessed against agreed "standards" that is- those activities that are essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experience.

Increasingly, specialty practice standards (such as competency statements, specialty advanced practice standards) are being produced from within the nursing and midwifery disciplines rather than by regulatory authorities.

Whilst professional standards for entry to nursing practice (competencies) have been developed and endorsed nationally by Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC), postgraduate specialty competencies and standards have developed in an ad hoc manner by special interest groups and colleges that State they represent particular group or speciality. Unlike specialty medical education, there is no recognised accreditation structure for nursing specialty education and/or professional development programs.

In Australia, the interests of specialty practice in nursing and midwifery as with other disciplines, is often represented by organisations and colleges. An increasing trend is for such groups to develop position statements, policies and competency standards that reflect their view of best practice in relation to their practice arena. The scope of such documents may include standards (however titled) related to professional practice, educational preparation and clinical practice.

The status of such standards for is unclear, as is the authority of the group to promote such standards. Whilst there is an increasing expectation from the community that the internal processes used by specialty groups to develop and maintain such standards are open to review and scrutiny by other professional groups as well as by consumers of professional services, there is no clear agreement on the ideal governance arrangements to ensure the public's confidence.

The Taskforce is therefore finalising the details of a project to develop an agreed set of "good governance" standards and processes for specialty groups to ensure that any competency statement or standards set by for organisations/groups representing nursing and midwifery interest are the result of sound, consistent processes or 'good governance'.

For more information on this project, please contact:

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