

Fact Sheet: Nursing Regulation and Practice

National
Review of
Nursing
Education 2002

What are the studies in this volume and who conducted them?

- **Selected review of nurse regulation** by Professor Mary Chiarella from the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Health, University of Technology, Sydney
- **Standards for nursing care and the relationship between skill mix and patient outcomes** by Professor Jackie Crisp, Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Health, University of Technology, Sydney
- **The scope of nursing practice** by Professor Margaret McMillan and team from the Faculty of Nursing, University Newcastle
- **The scope of nursing in Australia** by Dr Jacqueline Jones and Professor Julianne Cheek, Centre for Research into Nursing & Health Care, University of South Australia
- **Nursing career pathways project** by Dr Kay Price and team from the Centre for Research into Nursing and Health Care, University of South Australia

What does the research say?

Selected review of nurse regulation compares the legislation from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada examining the intent of the legislation, the levels of nurse who are given formal accreditation to practice and how the nurse gains accreditation to practice and retains it, the approaches to standards of practice and the factors that lead to removal of the right to practice.

The study found very different approaches in the legislation both internationally and nationally. Different approaches to defining what nurses work entails range from high level of prescription to those that take the view that decisions should be made on a more professional basis. Some take a professional view and others take a more client focused view of what forms the basis for nurse's work.

Standards for nursing care and the relationship between skill mix and patient outcomes summarised what is known about the relationship between the mix of different levels of workers doing nursing work (skill mix) and the impact on the patient. There was little information about the Australian situation so the findings are based on overseas experience. The report identifies the following:

- Reductions in the numbers of registered nurses and the proportion of qualified nurses in the nursing skill mix were introduced initially to deal with increasing health care costs.
- The changes to the mix of workers doing nursing work happened with little evaluation of the effect on patient care or outcomes.
- The latest global shortage of nurses has intensified the need to find the models of care that best use registered nurses who are becoming a scarce resource. There is now acceptance that to achieve this there is a need to be able to measure the impact nursing has on patient recovery.
- Administrative and clinical information systems are only now being developed with a focus on capturing the work of nurses.
- Several studies in the United States were commissioned in the late nineties to examine the link between skill mix and the outcomes of patient care. These studies are showing clear links between the use of qualified nurses and the reduction in complications arising during and after hospitalisation.

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- The demands of modern health care on health professionals have increased radically and continue to do so resulting in the need for highly developed critical problem solving and organisational skills.

The scope of nursing practice identified the contextual factors impacting on the work of nurses and nursing education. These are, increased diversity of the places and type of work they do, the increased illness of the people they care for, financial constraints, the legal and industrial environment and consumer expectations. Over the last two decades there has been a shift in the type of work nurses do. The practice of both enrolled and registered nurses has expanded so that what was previously the exception is now the norm. Enrolled nurses perform an increased number of technical skills. In addition to 'nursing skills', registered nurses require management, financial, and patient education skills as well as a high level of teamwork and collaborative practice. A range of models of nursing education exist but access to clinical learning opportunities remains a problem. Nurses need to be lifelong learners and while education is very important to nurses, the expectation lifelong learning needs to be embedded in performance criteria. Education needs to be appropriate, ongoing and accessible.

The scope of nursing in Australia describes the work of 38 nurses in different work situations and their thoughts about what is needed in the preparation of new nurses. The report gives an insight into the day to day activity of nurses in many different care situations. The nurses describe the fast turnover of patients in hospitals as increasing the focus of work to community care. Also, the increase in number of care assistants has increased the need for management and supervision.

The nurses suggested that the preparation of new nurses requires a greater clinical component and better interface between universities and the workplace in course development. They also recommend greater standardisation of nursing courses.

Enrolled nurses expressed frustration with a lack of career direction and recognition of individual experience in enrolled nurse positions.

The nursing career pathways project is a comprehensive analysis of the understandings, relationships and comparisons of career pathways for Australian nurses. It argues that career pathways are more than a map of education requirements, job opportunities and links between those options and the possible decision pathways for individuals. They also include the way image is created by outside bodies including government.

The researchers argue that the way nursing career pathways are described in their report provide an opportunity for national and state promotion of nursing.

The report challenges government departments to develop a better understanding of contemporary nursing practice and reflect it in the nursing information produced.

Is the research available?

Yes - all the research along with the review report *Our Duty of Care* is available on the review website at www.dest.gov.au/highered/programmes/nursing/ or on request by telephoning (02) 6240 7604 or (02) 6289 7543.