

NATIONAL REVIEW OF NURSING EDUCATION DISCUSSION PAPER

Question 6

It is HACSU's view that unregulated health care workers are playing an increasingly significant role in the provision of health care. This is particularly the case in Aged Care and Disability Services but is also increasing in acute settings.

The shortage of nurses has resulted in a greater reliance on non nurses providing care. In remote communities the difficulty in recruiting nurses has reached a critical stage and this has resulted in a greater reliance on unregulated carers.

HACSU believes that the current approach to unregulated carers is ad hoc and is being driven by budgetary reasons as much as the difficulty in attracting nurses. The financial difficulties faced by non government organizations as a result of inadequate funding means more organizations are opting for carers rather than nurses. A new approach is required, an approach that requires a more stringent training regime and an expectation that defined standards of care are being delivered.

The current approach to training does not require carers to meet defined standards, it is generally up to the individual to determine the level of training they wish to pursue rather than the industry setting standards of qualifications and or training. Positions in aged care, disability services and other care settings should be clearly linked to defined training outcomes.

The level of training/qualifications required for these positions should be appropriately remunerated to reflect the true value of the position. The current approach of employing the cheapest possible labour irrespective of the needs of clients should be replaced with an approach which defines training needs and rewards skills and qualifications.

HACSU does not consider it appropriate to regulate carers in the same way as are nurses. There does, however need to be a more consistent approach to the level of training required, the delivery of the training and the specific needs of the industry.

The approach should broadly be similar in all care settings, however, the skills and qualifications required will differ in different settings. State Governments through TAFE and non government training providers have a role to play in facilitating the skills analysis required and the curriculum development for various training courses suitable for each sector of the industry.

Question 7

HACSU believes that all staff who are involved in caring should have some minimum qualifications. This should be done in consultation with major stakeholders in the relevant sector. Clearly defined standards of care and the position requirements to deliver that standard need to be developed. The curriculum for training courses needs

to be developed with the standards of care in mind and consistency across the various training providers insisted upon.

Cares undergoing approved training should be accredited and their qualifications recognised across the sector, not merely the individual organization. The standards need to be consistent and the competencies required consistent with the standards.

It should be noted that the standards required should be realistic and care should be taken not to set educational requirements too high so as to discourage prospective carers from entering the industry.

Question 10

Governments both and Federal and State should work on a consistent approach to avoid poaching, otherwise smaller States particularly Tasmania would be disadvantaged. The nursing shortage is nationwide and should not be seen as the problem of a particular state. A uniform national strategy is required.

Question 12

There is little incentive for nurses to undertake specialist training with access and cost for nurses problematic. Employers are reluctant to provide financial assistance to cover the cost of courses or assistance in kind such as adequate time off to attend classes, undertake assignments and the like. There is generally no coverage of workloads for nurses absent on training, thus creating workload pressures on employees left to cope when nurses are absent.

There is clearly a dilemma for nurses in attempting to balance the needs of the workplace and their own professional development needs. There is insufficient recognition of the impact on service delivery of increasing the skills and knowledge of the nursing workforce. Similarly there is little recognition of the ongoing need for nurses to continue to upgrade their knowledge and skills in an environment constantly changing due to technology.

We believe that consideration should be given to providing assistance to nurses who wish to undergo postgraduate study to ensure their continuance in the profession. Such assistance can be in the form of direct financial assistance to cover tuition and HECS fees or in the form of indirect assistance such as paid time off to attend courses and assistance with workload issues. It is essential that nurses who wish to improve their knowledge and skills are encouraged to do so. There needs to be recognition that improving the skills and knowledge of nurses improves the quality of the care provided.

Question 13

Quality preceptorship is very important and can often be the determining factor as to whether a graduate continues with his/her career. The level of support provided to new nurse graduates has a significant impact on whether nurse graduates continue in the profession.

Unfortunately due to the increasing workload experienced by nurses in the clinical area fewer nurses are volunteering for this role. They do not feel that they are able to give students the quality time that is required in addition to their workload.

Recognition of the need for ongoing education (Refer Q. 12), family friendly rosters, provision of child care should be considered. Nurses often take time out to either pursue other career options or simply to get relief from a stressful workload. Re-entry after these breaks should be made easier and refresher courses should be made available to those nurses who wish to return to the nursing workforce.

Question 14

There should be a national approach to determining the scope of practice of nurses with consideration given to national registration.

This would enable nurses to move more easily from state to another and reduce registration costs in doing so.

Question 15

Ongoing education and professional development is a requirement for nurses. The responsibility for the ongoing education of nurses should be a joint responsibility of all parties involved. (Refer to Q. 12). However, financial considerations often play a role in determining whether a nurse proceeds with further education, particularly post graduate qualifications through tertiary institutions. Financial assistance should be considered for those who face hardship in pursuing additional qualifications.

Funding for health care should reflect the true cost and Governments need to recognise this and remedy the current situation. There is too much incentives built into the system for health care providers to seek to cut costs to meet budget demands. Educational opportunities are often the first to be reduced in the face of budget difficulties. Time off for attendance at courses, replacement staff for those who are absent on study leave (if and when it is available) become low priorities at times of cost containment.

Question 16

The shortage of registered nurses in the Aged Care Sector, in particular) results in Enrolled nurses taking on a significant responsibility for the care of aged patients. They are often required to supervise other staff and maintain the quality of care required by the facility and Government.

HACSU believes greater emphasis needs to be placed on the training requirements of Enrolled nurses. There needs to be greater access to bridging courses to enable Enrolled nurses to continue their training and upgrade their qualifications to registered Nurses.

Question 22

There should be national consistency around the scope of practice, education and training of Enrolled Nurses

This could be achieved through national registration or at the very least by national co-operation of the Registration boards in each State, and the training organisations. This would help widen the career choices for enrolled nurses and make it a more attractive option for those who wish to embark upon a nursing career but who for one reason or another are unable to pursue a university education.

Question 23

HACSU agrees with this approach because it would lend weight to the views put forward with in Q. 22.

Question 26

There is no doubt that much is expected of new graduates today and that preceptorship is very important. Governments must consider increasing funding to permit this to happen. There is not enough recognition of the burden that preceptorship creates for the preceptor. Nurse at all levels must be given the opportunity to “act up” into more senior roles. All too often senior positions particularly those which are not “hands on” are not filled during periods of leave because of budgetary constraints thus robbing nurse of valuable experience. Consequently some senior positions are absorbed over a period of time and nurses’ career path is further diminished. Furthermore nurse often lose considerable amounts of money due to loss in penalty rates and this can be another disincentive.

Question 30

Clinical placements can be contentious for student-enrolled nurses in particular. During such times there is a loss of income and there should be financial assistance available to nurses to help overcome this issue.

Question 33

HACSU has been instrumental in negotiating individual agreements between student enrolled nurses and employers to try to help ease the financial burden during training. Employers should be encouraged to provide interest free loans and the Government should reconsider the issue that prevents carers who have received financial assistance to undertake Certificate III training being ineligible for further financial assistance from the Government.