Nursing Specialization and Advanced Practice in Australia

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Nursing education has developed from preparation of a service role to:

1. Expansion of scientific knowledge
2. Attainment of clinical expertise
3. Use of critical thinking and evidence-based practice
Nursing Specialization

Dates back to 1919 in the United Kingdom.


Advanced Practice has been a dominant theme of the professional literature since the 1990’s.
Definition of NP/ANP

A registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context and/or country in which he/she is credentialed to practise and requires education at a master’s level of education.
Most Recognized Roles of Advanced Practice Globally

Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)

Nurse Practitioner (NP)

(Coombs, Chaboyer and Sole 2007)
Australian National Nursing and Midwifery Specialization Framework

Workforce predictions of a shortage of 40,000 nurses by 2010. (AHWAC 2004)

Recommendations from the National Review of Nursing Education (DEST 2002).

Poor statistical clarity attributed to inconsistent definitions of nursing specialties across databases.

Reported mismatch between federal funding and state and territory provision of health care services.

A lack of an international specialization framework that could be applied to the Australian workforce.
Ageing nursing workforce
Workforce casualization
Nurses preferring shorter working hours
Overall diversity of career choices for school leavers
Project Development and Mapping of a National Nursing and Midwifery Framework was commissioned in 2005 and completed in 2006.
Project Stages

- Literature review of how nursing specialties were defined globally;
- A review of nursing workforce frameworks was undertaken;
- A review of a search for criteria used to nominate nursing and midwifery groups as a specialty;
- Identification and review of current processes used globally and in Australia to determine specialization in nursing and how areas of practice were classified as specialties.
Six Criteria for Australian Nursing Specialties

1. Specialty is national in its geographic scope.
2. Specialty defines itself and subscribes to the overall purpose, functions and ethical standards of nursing.
3. The specialty is a distinct and defined area of nursing practice, which requires an application of specially focused knowledge and skills.
4. There is a demand and need for the speciality from the community.
5 The special practice is based on a core body of nursing knowledge, which is being continually expanded and redefined. For example, mechanisms exist for supporting, reviewing and disseminating research.

6 Specialty expertise is gained through various combinations of experience, formal and informal nursing education programs including but not limited to continuing education and professional development.
Development of the NP role in Australia

In 1993 three areas of practice were chosen for the original research projects:
Remote areas, general practice and district health services.

Interpretative nursing research study (Carryer, Gardner, Dunn and Gardner 2007) was commissioned by the Nursing Councils of Australia and New Zealand.

Core role of the NP was identified as having three components:
Dynamic practice, professional efficacy and clinical leadership.
Dynamic Practice

Structured through themes that recognize the features of NP practice that describe knowledge and skills that work and the measures taken by the NP to maintain clinical expertise.

Comprehensive skills in patient assessment.
Requires addressing currency of practice on a continuous basis.
Professional Efficacy

Nursing at a level of practice that is supported by significant autonomy and accountability.

NP is responsible for the complete episode of care which implies the need to act autonomously in decision making and follow through in patient care.

Recognition of some overlap with activities that were previously considered to be in the domain of medicine.
Clinical Leadership

Strong base in clinical experience and education which develops extensive and extended clinical skills and a focus on the place of nursing in the health service.

In-depth knowledge about the legal and ethical dimensions of practice, policy directives and best practice.
Australian Definition of NP

A registered nurse educated and authorized to function autonomously and collaboratively in an extended clinical role. The nurse practitioner role includes assessment and management of clients using nursing knowledge and skills and may include but is not limited to the direct referral of patients to other health professionals, prescribing medications and ordering diagnostic investigations.
Australian National Registration and Accreditation Scheme

The Council of Australian Governments signed an intergovernmental agreement in 2008 and for the first time in history created a single national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals.

Nationally consistent legislation has now been passed in each state and territory with transitional legislation passed in each state and territory to establish the scheme and enable its implementation.

We now have a national set of standards for accreditation and registration of nurse practitioners.
Any questions?