

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Public safety is the number one priority for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery

On Monday 20th April at 8.30pm the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, (ABC) Four Corners program broadcast serious concerns regarding the decline of academic standards at higher / further education institutions around the country, and in particular the levels of literacy in regard to overseas students studying nursing.

Professor Wendy Cross, Chair of the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery, Australia and New Zealand (CDNM) responds, "The Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery has, at its core, the safety of the public. We are concerned about the imputation that nursing schools have "dumbed down" curricula, assessment and entry standards. There have certainly been isolated cases of incompetence and English language illiteracy among graduates and clearly some very disenfranchised former academics".

Professor Cross continues, "Four Corners painted a very one-sided picture and did not appear to seek input from other universities, the majority of which are producing sound graduates with appropriate communication skills. However, the alleged exploitation of international students by agents is of grave concern and the CDNM deplors such practices. International and permanent resident domestic students have specific needs and require significant input from academics and pastoral care workers. This does not mean we pass poor performing students but work with them to enable success. The issues of plagiarism have been largely addressed by the use of appropriate software programs. Widespread intimidation by universities has not been our experience and should intimidation occur by students, university discipline policies are employed".

Answering more of Four Corners' allegations, Professor Cross highlighted how structural changes to education funding have influenced the situation, "The uncapping of undergraduate student places in 2012 has placed pressure on universities to increase numbers and in some instances this has led to lower ATAR scores. The CDNM welcomes a mandated minimum ATAR for nursing and midwifery".

Professor Cross concludes, "All of the issues outlined by Four Corners have been placed at the feet of nursing when these problems occur across many disciplines. To isolate nursing is to create fear among the public based on limited and unbalanced evidence".

The CDNM is the peak organisation that represents the Deans and Heads of the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Council is the voice of tertiary education for nurses and midwives, and provides leadership on health policy, education standards and research as applied to nurses and midwives. The Council encourages responsive and responsible approaches to university education that meet the current and future needs of people and communities.

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