



**COUNCIL OF DEANS
OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY**
(Australia & New Zealand)

Position Statement: Gerontological Nursing to Improve Care of Older People

The CDNM is the peak organisation representing Nursing and Midwifery Deans and Heads of School in Higher Education throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Council is the voice of education and research for nurses and midwives, and provides leadership on health policy, education standards and research as applied.

Background

The Council of Deans supports the promotion of best practice in gerontological (care of older people) nursing through adequate numbers of appropriately educated registered nurses. This statement is made in the context of the Interim Report Royal Commission (RC) into Quality and Safety in Aged Care ¹, the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Review ², and unprecedented reporting of challenges in caring for older Australians and New Zealanders. It is clear that new staffing models and increased education are needed to address ageism, reablement, frailty, dementia, consumer-directed care and palliative care.

Nurses' unique clinical role in caring for individuals, sick or well, is the assessment of health status and interventions to assist individuals in activities that contribute to health, recovery or to dignified death ³. Nurses work in partnership with older people and are well placed to lead and determine care of older Australians and New Zealanders.

The current nursing degree is a three-year full-time degree which results in an 'entry-level' practitioner. While many submissions to the RC called for more training for aged care workers this cannot adequately address the knowledge required to plan, implement delegate, supervise and evaluate the complex care required by those using Aged Care Services. These gerontological nursing skills have been recognised in other jurisdictions around the world ⁴.

Summary

- The RC Interim Report highlighted that key clinical care deficits in caring for older adults included: wound care, incontinence management, dementia and related behavioural and psychological symptoms with reference to prescribing and deprescribing of antipsychotics, palliative care, and mental health care. These are all core nursing skills.
- The RC interim report highlighted the need for increased education in the areas of gerontology across all disciplines.
- The RC highlighted the need for caring and empathetic staff as a fundamental aspect of good outcomes for older Australians, these are the fundamental ethos of nursing.

Position

The fundamental problems exposed in care delivery for older adults in Australia and New Zealand across all sectors calls for changes to nurse education. Nurses need to have contemporary knowledge and be able to lead care of older adults as part of interdisciplinary teams. Older adults require nursing services across all health service fields including primary health, rural health, mental health, acute care, community care and aged care.



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Undergraduate education is central to prepare nurses with the requisite skills for gerontological nursing across diverse environments. Educational topics include consumer-directed care, patient-centred care, ageism, ageing well, and health and wellbeing over the life course at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Postgraduate education prepares nurses to lead care through undertaking comprehensive assessments, planning nurse interventions and undertaking advanced nursing practice roles such as Nurse Practitioners. Clinical skills requiring high level expertise would include but not be limited to chronic wound care, pain management, incontinence support, nurse prescribing and deprescribing, advocacy, dementia management, and advanced care planning.

Adequate levels of Registered Nurses working in aged care services are also vital to improving care. Registered nurses with gerontological expertise will have the capacity to plan, implement (including delegation and supervision of aged care workers, and referral to an involvement of other health professionals) and evaluate care for older Australians using aged care services.

In considering the education of nurses for care of older adults, the following position is taken:

- The CDNM expects that academics teaching gerontological nursing have qualifications and expertise in gerontological nursing, and currently very few Australian or New Zealand nurses possess these qualifications.
- The CDNM proposes that undergraduate registered nurse education should include a gerontological nursing unit and/or threaded content throughout the curriculum, guided by a national curriculum approach, addressing issues such as ageism, healthy ageing, and palliative care.
- The CDNM expects that nurses seeking to work solely with adults of advanced age or with geriatric syndromes would have post graduate qualifications.
- The CDNM supports the need for development and funding of advanced nursing practice roles to provide appropriate health and wellbeing services to older adults.
- The CDNM supports undergraduate placements in the aged care sector where the aged care quality and safety standards are being met, staffing levels of registered nurses meet an established benchmark, and dedicated and educated facilitators supervise.
- The CDNM supports the urgent need to review models of care and staffing levels in aged care services.

References

1. Commonwealth of Australia. Royal commission into aged care quality and safety interim report: Neglect. 2019
2. Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce. A matter of care australia's aged care workforce strategy. 2018
3. International Council of Nurses. Nursing definitions. 2019
4. Organisation WH. Who europe gerontological nursing curriculum. *WHO European Strategy for Continuing Education for Nurses and Midwives*. 2003