

RESEARCH IN NURSING SCHOOLS

The Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia and New Zealand) totally reject that Sarah Russell presents a full, balanced and accurate picture of nursing education and wishes to comment on nursing in Australia.

There are 36 Schools of Nursing in Australian universities and colleges. In *The Australian Higher Education Supplement* of 24 November 2004 Sarah Russell claims on the basis of “my observations of two university nursing schools” all manner of intellectual deficiencies which she implies are rife in schools of nursing generally.

Twenty years ago the Commonwealth Government decided that all education of registered nurses should be carried out in Colleges of Advanced Education (which within a few years became universities). Those colleges had a commitment to professional education (or as Sarah Russell prefers, “vocational education”) and to establishing clinical partnerships with local and state health care facilities. Most of their ethos since they were re-labelled “universities” has been the same, and Australia has gained from the strong work in the applied fields and technologies that they perform. Nursing is one such applied field, with a strong emphasis on evidence-based practice and research into nursing, health care and patient outcomes: all of which has been of great benefit to Australian society.

The close relationship between schools of nursing and hospitals or other health facilities is equivalent to the relationships which all universities now foster between their academics and industry, the professions and the wide community. To this extent, it is common for leading practitioners such as directors of nursing in major hospitals to be titled “professor” in an adjunct capacity to a university school. The same custom applies in other professions such as medicine, architecture and law.

One of Ms Russell’s criticisms is that there is little intellectual ferment in nursing schools with “few vibrant displays of intellectual and political awareness on office doors and departmental noticeboards”. Similarly, the same could be said for other schools in universities. One can only assert, contrary to Ms Russell’s assertions, that Academics in Nursing hold political and social views just as strongly as other members of universities and of the general community.

Since the Government’s decision to transfer the preparation of registered nurses into higher education, there have been two major reviews of nursing education as well as the national reviews of higher education as a whole, and the less extensive reviews that are carried on within States and within individual universities. Not one of these has suggested that nurse education be transferred out of the sector, and the two major ones have reaffirmed that that is the right place for it. All Registered Nurses must meet the requirements of their State registration boards, just as many other professions have to do.

The Council has no doubt that some nursing schools are stronger than others, and all are striving to improve their performance, particularly in the field of funded research. The

picture of nursing and research in Australian universities is positive, strong and value adding to our health care future in Australia.

Response from Mrs Rhonda Marriott, Head, School of Nursing, Murdoch University and Associate Professor Lynette Stockhausen, Head, School of Nursing and Health Science, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst Campus for the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery(Australia and New Zealand).