

Transitioning into primary health care: A new opportunity for nurses

Despite growing demand in primary health care, there is expected to be an acute shortage of the workforce at the forefront of primary health care services; nurses.

Analysis conducted by (now defunct) Health Workforce Australia projected a shortfall in the 'other nursing sector' workforce (which includes primary health care nurses working in general practice) of 27,000 by 2025; one of the highest shortfalls of any nursing sector.¹

Some of the reasons for the projected shortfall of primary health care nurses are high exit rates and low numbers of workforce entrants.

Although there is an impending shortage of nurses there is currently an increasing rate of unemployment within the nursing profession overall. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 9,100 registered nurses and midwives in Australia were unemployed – a 102% increase from 2011.² With this in mind, innovative strategies are needed to address recruitment and retention issues in the primary health care nursing workforce to

ensure our communities continue to receive high quality care from a well supported and engaged nursing workforce.

As part of the Nursing in Primary Health Care (NiPHC) three year program, through its Transition to Practice program, APNA is striving to develop an innovative strategy which aims to contribute to the body of national research around health workforce solutions, and further to this, be part of an overall strategy to encourage and support Australian nurses to transition to primary health.



What are we doing?

APNA Transition to Practice plans to model and test an accessible, flexible and structured 12 month support program to increase the confidence, competence, skill and knowledge of new graduates and existing nurses who are starting work in primary health care settings.

The 12 month program is a work setting-based, structured yet flexible support program. It is not a degree, diploma or certificate qualification and is not a formal graduate year but will support the transition process and encourage nurses to seek further career progression in their chosen primary health care field.

There will be two tranches in the three year period 2015 to 2018.

The first tranche of APNA Transition to Practice will launch in April 2016 for up to 25 registered nurses and workplaces, following a national expression of interest process carried out in February of this year throughout areas of primary health care.

The program will encompass the core themes of primary health care and have flexibility for nurses to individualise training requirements using self-determined learning and reflection as they progress and become more confident in the workplace.

The transitioning nurse will be supported at a local level through their nursing colleagues (preceptors) and employing workplace. APNA will provide access to a range of educational activities as well as providing experienced primary health care nurse mentors outside the nurse's workplace to offer valuable mentoring opportunities to further support the transitioning nurse.

Mentorship and preceptorship is invaluable to the nursing profession. It contributes to the professional development of others and is embedded in the competency standards for all Australian registered nurses. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's *National competency standards for the registered nurse* determines that a nurse participates where possible in preceptorship, coaching and mentoring to assist and develop colleagues.³ Mentoring also features strongly in the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation *National practice standards for nurses in general practice*.⁴ Although the competency standards suggest registered nurses participate in preceptorship, coaching and mentoring, the important qualifier to this statement is that this is only required 'where possible'. Unless appropriate and supporting structures and processes are in place there may be no opportunity for nurses to be exposed to preceptorship or mentoring, nor to realise the value of providing this to their colleagues.

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Lisa Collison

Project Manager – APNA Transition to Practice

Meet the team



Lisa Collison

Project Manager – APNA Transition to Practice

Lisa is an experienced registered nurse who has worked in primary health care for more than 23 years, predominantly in general practice and in leadership roles. She has enjoyed geographic variety and culturally diverse practice populations which has influenced her nursing practice.



Rebekah Cox

Senior Project Officer – APNA Transition to Practice

Bec is a registered nurse from New Zealand who completed her graduate year in general practice where she worked for three years before moving to Melbourne. Overcoming language and funding differences, Bec established a healthy lifestyle clinic to help people struggling with their weight. Bec is now senior project officer for APNA's Transition to Practice program.



Read more about APNA Transition to Practice by visiting www.apna.asn.au/transitiontopractice.

References

1. Health Workforce Australia (HWA). Australia's Future Health Workforce – Nurses. 2014. Available from: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/australias-future-health-workforce-nurses>.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Nursing and midwifery workforce [homepage on the internet]. c2014. Available from: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/workforce/nursing-and-midwifery>.
3. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. National competency standards for the registered nurse. 2006. Available from: <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Professional-standards.aspx>.
4. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. National Practice Standards for Nurses in General Practice. 2014. Available from: <http://anmf.org.au/news/entry/national-practice-standards-for-nurses-in-general-practice>.