

28<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Carolyn Reed  
Chief Executive  
Nursing Council of New Zealand  
PO Box 9644  
Wellington 6141  
New Zealand

Dear Carolyn

**REQUEST FOR ADVOCACY & INCLUSION OF MENTAL HEALTH NURSING  
COMPETENCIES IN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING PROGRAMMES**

As you are aware, Te Ao Māramatanga the New Zealand College of Mental Health Nurses (the College) has commenced the development of a comprehensive certification, credentialing and accreditation framework. As part of this development, the College would want to ensure articulation between undergraduate and post-graduate nursing programmes for registered nurses. On behalf of the College I am therefore writing to ask the Council to consider advocating for the inclusion of mental health nursing competencies in under-graduate nursing education programmes. The details of this proposal are set out in the attached document, and include international as well as local evidence that supports our request.

We want to ensure that New Zealand and overseas nurses who become registered nurses have the best, evidence-based competencies appropriate for a generalist nurse in their training. Internationally these are the competencies developed by the International Psychiatric Nursing Association (IPNA) for generalist nursing (see attached). The College is strongly linked into other specialist mental health nursing bodies globally and we are concerned that providers of under-graduate nursing education programmes incorporate/adapt as required these competencies as part of the core New Zealand curriculum. While the need for a standardised programme did not appear to be an outcome from the recent NZNO hosted forum on undergraduate nursing programmes the establishment of core components was supported.

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We would be happy to discuss this request with you and to assist in the process of including mental health competencies in the registered nurse under-graduate education framework.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daryle Deering', with a stylized, cursive script.

Daryle Deering RN PhD  
President Te Ao Māramatanga NZCMHN

**PROPOSAL FOR THE INCLUSION OF MENTAL HEALTH COMPETENCIES  
IN THE  
CORE REGISTERED UNDERGRADUATE NURSING CURRICULUM**

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**Proposal**

This proposal seeks the agreement of the Nursing Council of New Zealand to advocate for the inclusion of core mental health competencies in under-graduate education programmes for registered nurses.

**Introduction**

Since at least 2001 the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognised the integral relationship between mental health and physical health, and the clear understanding that one cannot occur without the other. Registered nurses, in any area of nursing practice, should expect to work with people with a range of mental health and addiction problems, in the context of their presenting health needs. This requires registered nurses to have a basic understanding of core mental health competencies, and a clear understanding that mental health nursing is a specialised area, as defined by the WHO and approved by the International Council of Nurses (ICN).

*A mental health/psychiatric nurse is 'a graduate from a recognized, university level nursing school with specialization in mental health nursing. Psychiatric nurses are registered at the local nursing board (or equivalent) and work in a mental health care setting'*

The College supports the above definition but also wants to ensure that in accordance with an evolving health care delivery system, all registered nurses have a greater understanding of mental health and substance use/addictions, as this is part of everyday health for all people.

**Supporting arguments**

The concept of including mental health competencies in the core registered nursing curriculum is not new. In the late 1990s the Ministry of Health together with the Nursing Council of New Zealand developed mental health guidelines for under-graduate nursing curricula. However, these guidelines were subsequently discontinued. College members report concerns regarding the impact of this, both in relation to how contemporary mental health and addictions knowledge and skills are being taught, the qualifications of the

tutors teaching those subjects and the nature of clinical placements, supervision and qualifications of supervisors.

The inclusion of core mental health competencies will not only better equip registered nurses working throughout health sectors to contribute to the mental health and wellbeing of all their clients, but will also provide new graduates wishing to work in the area of mental health, with a more solid basis on which to enter the post-graduate entry to specialty mental health and addiction education programme.

As you are aware, our undergraduate education programmes alone do not meet the registration requirements in the UK to work in mental health. They can only meet these requirements with our entry into specialist practice programme or advanced mental health programmes. However, in New Zealand at present all registered nurses can work in mental health, without the benefit of, or the requirement to meet, evidence-based competencies such as those developed by the International Psychiatric Nursing Association (IPNA).

There are a number of reasons why this proposal needs to be addressed with a degree of urgency. Among such reasons, is the significant body of research and evidence concerning the burden of disease, high level of co-morbid illness, increased vulnerability, high levels of abuse, discrimination and stigma, and widening disparities in health status experienced by people with mental illness and addiction related problems. There is an increasing call for greater implementation of health promotion, education and early intervention strategies as well as for continuing care and support for people in their recovery journey.

Furthermore, nurses are working in an ever-widening range of service settings, with an increasingly diverse client group across the age span. Many people with mental health and substance use problems or illnesses are able to be effectively treated within the primary health care sector, and we should expect registered nurses working in this setting to be able to work with this group of individuals and their families and whānau.

This request from the College is designed to bring New Zealand into line with international practice. It is no longer acceptable for registered nurses working in other fields of health to receive often only minimal preparation to enable them to recognise and intervene in the area of mental health and substance use/behavioural addictions. For example, the International Society of Psychiatric Nursing (ISPN) and the American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA) have identified a mental health core curriculum and objectives for entry level professional nurses. The introduction to the competencies developed by the ISPN and APNA states that:

*Despite the urgent need for education that prepares all nurses to recognize and intervene in the area of mental health, most generalist nurses practicing today have limited preparation in the principles of psychiatric nursing care. Many nursing education programs no longer have a required course in psychiatric nursing and fewer than ever teach appropriate therapeutic interactive skills or*

*emphasize these skills across all clinical courses. To meet the current need, a renewed focus on psychiatric, mental health and substance use treatment skills is needed in professional nursing education and practice. Thus, the purpose of this current document, Essential Competencies for Psychiatric, Mental Health and Substance Use Nursing For the Generalist Nurse will help nurse educators to incorporate specific psychiatric nursing content into nursing curricula.*

*The International Society of Psychiatric Nursing (ISPN), and The American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA) have identified a core curriculum and terminal objectives for entry level professional nurses in the area of psychiatric and mental health care. AACN's The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice (AACN, 2008) provided a framework for developing, defining, and revising the competencies in the present document. This document addresses the professional values, core competencies, core knowledge, and role of the professional nurse caring for persons with psychiatric and substance use disorders and persons at risk for mental illness. These core values, competencies, and knowledge are vital in ensuring that all generalist nurses are prepared to provide accessible, evidence-based, quality psychiatric, mental health and substance use disorder care for all persons'.<sup>1</sup>*

These statements are as relevant to professional nursing in New Zealand as they are to the profession in the United States and other countries. We are also aware of previous New Zealand attempts e.g. supported by the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand to improve the undergraduate preparation of nurses in the area of substance use/addiction, as for medical students.

Finally, New Zealand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (of which mental illness is one)<sup>2</sup> which among other aspects, emphasises the need for people with disabilities to receive 'the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability'. Article 25 of the Convention states that (among other factors) parties shall:

- a. Provide persons with disabilities the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other persons, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health and population-based public health programmes
- b. Provide those health services needed by persons with disabilities specifically because of their disabilities, including early identification and intervention as appropriate and services designed to minimize and prevent further disabilities including among children and older persons

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Nursing, International Society of Psychiatric Nursing, American Psychiatric Nurses Association: Essential Psychiatric, Mental Health and Substance Use Competencies for the Generalist Nurse (draft for review, March 2009)

<sup>2</sup> [www.un.org/disabilities/convention](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention)

- c. **Require health professionals** to provide care of the same quality to persons with disabilities as to others, including on the basis of free and informed consent by, inter alia, raising awareness of the human rights, dignity, autonomy and needs of persons with disabilities through training and the promulgation of ethical standards for public and private health care.

As a signatory to the Convention, New Zealand is required to meet these obligations. Other conventions, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are also relevant.

### **Conclusion**

This request is not an endeavour to turn out registered nurses who are qualified as mental health nurses; that needs to remain a specialty area of nursing. In addition, the College is of the view that these competencies are not appropriate for enrolled nurses or nursing assistants; rather, they belong to the undergraduate comprehensive nursing programme of the RN.

We are aware that the Council continues to consult on undergraduate education for the registered nursing programme, and we have previously supplied the attached competencies to the Council. We therefore ask that you consider inclusion of these competencies as a core curricula component and also advocate for current programmes to:

- incorporate these competencies – adapting them as required for the New Zealand cultural context- in their programmes.
- ensure that those responsible for teaching and supervising students in mental health placements are qualified specialist mental health nurses
- ensure that student placements reflect the spectrum of mental health settings and services.
- ensure that student assessment processes reflect the key areas of mental health for generalist nurses as outlined in the attached competencies.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you, and we offer any assistance that may be required to adapt the competencies for New Zealand and to ensure their inclusion in the New Zealand under-graduate registered nursing curriculum.

### **References:**

American Academy of Nursing, International Society of Psychiatric Nursing, American Psychiatric Nurses Association: Essential Psychiatric, Mental Health and Substance Use Competencies for the Generalist Nurse (draft for review, March 2009)

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United Nations: Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatments or Punishment (OPCAT)

United Nations: Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) [www/unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities.  
[www.un.org/disabilities/convention](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention)

World Health Organisation (WHO): *Mental Health and Development: Targeting people with mental health conditions as a vulnerable group*, WHO 2010.