NEW ZEALAND
NURSES
ORGANISATION

2003 REVIEW OF THE TRANS TASMAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) represents over 33,000 nurses and health workers who work both in the public and private health sector. NZNO members include registered nurses, midwives, nursing students, enrolled nurses, caregivers and some allied health professionals.

1.2 The New Zealand Nurses Organisation is an affiliate of the Council of Trade Unions – the democratic body representing 300,000 workers in New Zealand. NZNO enjoys a collaborative working relationship with the Australian Nurses Federation.

1.3 NZNO is a member of the International Council of Nurses – the body whose purpose is to provide a medium through which national nursing associations share common interests and work together to develop the contribution of nursing to the promotion of the health of all people

1.4 NZNO is pleased to make comment on the review of mutual recognition arrangements between Australia and New Zealand. Processes around the regulation of health professionals are central to the role of professional and industrial representative organisations.

1.5 NZNO supports and recognizes the need for arrangements and process on occupational regulation. Nursing has always been a mobile and international workforce. NZNO advocates for agreements that provide a high level of protection for patients, nurses and health workers. NZNO notes the draft Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health workers and strongly supports this process and Code.

2.0 International Agreements

2.1 Globalisation is making the requirements for occupational regulation agreements and arrangements critical. Added to this, the international shortage of nurses is causing severe strain on national health services with much greater nursing and health worker mobility. International agreements must be established to provide important protections for patients, nurses, health workers and health services in this increasingly mobile world.

2.2 NZNO's concern is to ensure that arrangements to obtain mutual recognition of professional qualifications do not lead to a downward leveling of professional standards. The pressure to have mutual recognition agreements could lead to the greater emphasis on the agreement outcomes, rather than ensuring the goal to strengthen nursing care standards and in turn improve health care services.

2.3 It is the view of NZNO that the approach to international agreements concerning occupational regulation should be based on certain principles that are supported at both international and national levels. NZNO supports mutual regulation agreements and arrangements be based on principles of flexibility, accountability, transparency, and equality.

2.4 The process and context for establishing agreement is essential to consider. NZNO wants a requirement to consult with the profession as a component of the mutual recognition process. The regulatory authorities are the statutory bodies and are responsible for upholding legislative and regulatory processes. To ensure full knowledge of all issues and aspects of occupational regulations, and to ensure democratic and truly consultative processes, NZNO believes that there must be a requirement in processes of mutual recognition to consult with representative professional bodies.

3.0 Occupational Regulation

3.1 The training, qualifications and remuneration of health professionals are the most important factors in delivering good quality health services and health outcomes. NZNO has a commitment to regulatory processes that are based on the inclusion of the profession in this process – the aspect of professional regulation referred to as self-regulation. Self-regulation is based on the premise that professional groups have the knowledge base, a commitment to a code of ethics, a search for innovative practice and a sense of collegiality. Self-regulation is an essential element in maintaining high quality standards of care.

3.2 Another concern held by NZNO is that moves to ease the recognition of professional qualifications between countries could lead to considerations that are of fundamental importance to the health care of

New Zealanders being subject to trade-off. To give an example – the concept of cultural safety is fundamental to nursing training and nursing care in New Zealand. Cultural safety recognizes that to care and nurse people safely, nurses need to examine their own cultural realities, attitudes and behaviour and the impact this has on others. This requirement could be overridden in moves to ease requirements for professional qualifications between countries in nursing and midwifery.

3.3 In essence, mutual recognition agreements must ensure that national concerns and protections are upheld in international agreements or arrangements between national governments. The Treaty of Waitangi is an example of such a national interest.

3.4 NZNO recognizes that while Australia and New Zealand share many similarities in the regulation of nursing and nursing education there are also differences. NZNO notes that this review is considering the mutual agreements between states in Australia as well as the arrangements between New Zealand and Australia. The undergraduate nursing training programmes and requirements can vary from one Australian state to another – thus making it difficult at times to establish whether there is in fact true equivalency between Australian and New Zealand nursing training programmes.

3.5 The issue for us is to ensure that equivalency is equivalency and to ensure that where it is not, or not perceived to be, there are fair, equitable and transparent processes to ensure that nurses can apply for and obtain occupational regulation in another country.

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