

My colleagues have already presented many detailed submissions for the Productivity Commission. I wish to tell my story about my journey in Maternal & Child Health (MCH) Nursing.

I began nursing in the mid 1980s. After a decade which included Midwifery I was interested in MCH Nursing. This was a decision I did not take lightly as the previous decade had not made this an appealing choice for the following reasons:

1. While many MCH Nurses were older, they were still far from retirement so jobs in this field rarely became available.
2. The main pathway to a MCH job was as a reliever – with no job security or stability, an untenable way of life with no guarantee of future employment.
3. The Compulsory Competitive Tendering Process of the early 1990s made it clear this was a career under considerable stress & threat – no promise of any future.
4. The training was very expensive.

Despite these hurdles & feeling like I was making an expensive gamble with my career, I applied twice, unsuccessfully. The third year I was offered a place; I borrowed the substantial fee & took a step towards what looked like a job which held no prospects. I knew no-one else taking such a risky step. Your report questions the need for the scholarships, yet since they have been available I regularly encounter many MCH students.

The report asks if MCH Nurses require Midwifery Training. I constantly rely on the knowledge gained in these studies – in fact, most days I wish I had more knowledge & training, not less.

The report also mentions the nursing shortage & aging workforce as if these are minor matters that will resolve spontaneously due the attractiveness of MCH Nursing. If this was the case then this would have occurred by now! The nursing shortage, which has been predicted for decades, is very real in MCH Nursing. I currently work 5 shifts a week & refuse about the same number. I still work shifts, I expect this to continue until I retire – another misconception presented in the report. Also, with regard to the remuneration, I believe there would be very few professions, which require as many years of study (7.5 years in my case), which would pay so little!

In conclusion, I wish to refer to a widely used metaphor; the MCH Profession is the “fence at the top of the cliff”. This report seems to be asking how many rungs can be removed from this fence before the number of tragedies, needing “ambulances”, at the base of the cliff become unacceptable. Surely the question should be how we can reduce disasters by strengthening & extending this fence.