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The Cancer Nurses Society of Australia: Submission to the independent review of nursing education – *Educating the Nurse of the Future*

Dear Professor Schwartz,

Please find below a submission to the independent review of nursing education on behalf of the Cancer Nurses Society of Australia (CNSA). CNSA is the peak professional body for nurses working with Australians affected by cancer. Our 1400 members work across all jurisdictions and sectors, and comprise all levels of the nursing workforce, from undergraduate nurses through to advanced practice registered nurses. Below we provide commentary on three key areas of the Review.

1. Advanced practice roles (that include but are not limited to Nurse Practitioners)
2. Attraction and international competitiveness
3. Future focused

Level 1 evidence demonstrates that advanced and specialist nursing roles play a leading role in the development and delivery of future-focused, person-centred models of health care delivery¹. To deliver against our potential as leaders of sustainable health care, nurses require graduate level educational pathways that enable development of the skills and knowledge necessary to innovate services and create attractive and internationally competitive career pathways.

Professions such as law, chartered accountancy, and medicine have clear pathways that require completion of graduate qualifications to allow entry into expanded and higher levels of practice. These pathways require evidence of knowledge attainment through examination. With the exception of Nurse Practitioner roles this is largely absent for nurses in Australia. This is detrimental to attracting international nurses who work in countries where graduate (formerly postgraduate) practice specialisation is recognised and rewarded. In addition, it impacts competitiveness of Australian nurses in international markets where evidence of graduate education is required or preferred. Although some Colleges in Australia have taken carriage of graduate education pathways, (such as the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses), we now need to extend this to other nursing career pathways, such as cancer nursing. This is critical to attracting and retaining exemplary professionals to the nursing workforce.

Cancer and the Australian population: Preparing a future focused workforce

One in two Australian men and women will be diagnosed with cancer by the age of 85 (Cancer Australia, 2019) presenting a major challenge to effective health care delivery and economic burden to the Australian economy². As a disease predominantly of older adults, the incidence and prevalence of cancers will rise into the next decade as the Australian population continues to age³. As cancer treatments advance, patients are living longer and need ongoing surveillance and management of late and long-term side-effects of their treatments. These care requirements are ideally suited to nurse-led models⁴. Furthermore, as therapy has advanced, most patients receive care in ambulatory settings. This has shifted the focus of where cancer

nurses need to work and creates an urgent need for nurses with the requisite knowledge and skills to lead shared-care, cross sector models that require them to work to their full scope of practice.

The Review's terms of reference in focussing on Enrolled Nurses, Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners, appears to leave little scope for examining the educational provision required to enable nurses to take up innovative and flexible cancer nursing roles, and to deliver the changes required to models of care to meet complex health needs in Australia. In addition, the lack of progress on expanding the scope of practice of base-grade nurses to enable designated prescribing hampers effective and efficient health care delivery. Graduate education and training pathways need to be developed to support the advancement of nursing roles to meet the demands of a modern health system. The current lack of graduate pathways to support cancer nursing careers presents a critical risk to attract and retain excellent candidates in the nursing workforce; to our nurses' international competitiveness, and to the creation of future focused, dynamic professional pathways for beginner, novice, specialist and advanced practice nurses.

The opportunity

Evidence-based competency standards already exist for cancer nursing⁵ and these could be used as a credentialing tool by the Board to mandate advanced and specialist career pathways.

We recommend that clear career graduate pathways, underpinned by requisite education, will attract more nurses to the workforce by delivering transparent and accredited pathways for career progression. The development of competency frameworks that map role innovation and diversity across tumour types, specialist therapy environments, clinical, education, management, quality, research and senior administrative roles as well as environments and sectors of care, will deliver an attractive and sustainable blueprint for a long-lasting nursing career. To achieve this vision, investment in and attention to graduate education and aligned career pathways, as well as university-health service partnerships for the delivery of such education, will be essential. Although we have presented an argument for attention to a specialty cancer nursing graduate pathway, this is not an isolated area and we recommend the Review consider this as a critical component against the Review terms of Reference for all areas of nursing specialty.

The Cancer Nurses Society of Australia thanks the Review Board for the opportunity to submit this document and wish the Board well in this important process.



Lucy Gent (formerly Patton)

President of the Cancer Nurses Society of Australia

On behalf of the Cancer Nurses Society of Australia Board and Professorial Advisory Committee.

References

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