

# The Role of Schools of Nursing in Continuing Professional Education Provision

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Nurses in Australia are required to undertake continuing professional education (CPE) in order to maintain registration.



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CPE is defined as coursework undertaken by practising nurses with the aim of maintaining standards of clinical practice (Hegney et al. 2010). In Australia, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and midwives are required to complete 20 CPE hours per 12-month registration period.

CPE can involve the revision or acquisition of new knowledge and skills. However, best practice for CPE in nursing is to create an individual learning plan based on career direction and concentrate on CPE opportunities which match this plan (Ross, Barr and Stevens 2013).

There are numerous providers of CPE for nurses. Most accessible to the working nurse are online providers of quick coursework to meet necessary

CPE requirements for registration. In addition, there are other specialised courses available through professional nursing and medical associations.

However, there are barriers to accessing CPE with cost being the most frequently cited factor (Hegney et al. 2010). Nurses cite the need for support to complete CPE which includes financial aid and leave from regular duties during paid work time to complete study. Additional barriers to accessing CPE include geography, method of course provision, work/life balance and work conditions.

For nurses, CPE opportunities are often serendipitous and offered by the employer. However, there is an emerging role for Australian universities in the provision of CPE for nurses.

There are opportunities for university nursing programs to partner with organisations who employ advanced practice nurses in providing continuing education.

in providing continuing education. One role of these partnerships is to educate staff in very specialised areas of nursing practice.

### CPE OFFERINGS BY AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS OF NURSING

A number of Australian Schools of Nursing offer CPE for nurses in three broad categories: overseas experience-based education, general/allied health courses, and area-specific short courses. Some schools also offer short courses to overseas nurses to meet Australian registration requirements. There is no agreed-upon standard for enrolment prerequisites, fees, or course content across universities.

Professional education is available both online and in person. There is some overlap between courses offered as postgraduate certificate qualifications and short courses. Common CPE courses at Australian Schools of Nursing are listed below. Apart from leadership coursework, the content offered tends to focus on specialised areas of nursing practice that may be used across many specialty areas.

- Chronic care
- Dementia
- Disease outbreaks
- Immunisation nurse
- Leadership
- Mental health
- Ophthalmic nursing
- Palliative care
- Pharmacology
- Prescribing
- Sexual health
- Wound management

### BENEFITS OF UNIVERSITY PROVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING

Australian nurses have an emerging role in the provision of extended levels of care and health service providers are negotiating the expansion of nursing roles. Recent years have seen the development of nursing roles to advanced practice roles and, with this expansion, the addition of capabilities such as prescribing and disease diagnosis and management (Douglas et al. 2017).

CPE programs will need to include course offerings that support the ongoing professional development of this new group of nurses with clinically expanded roles. Effective CPE partnerships in schools of nursing should address both educational and career advancement and the future of nursing practice (Beal 2012). In conclusion, Schools of Nursing have an emerging role in the provision of CPE offerings, particularly to advanced nurses seeking opportunities for targeted continuing professional education.

Recently multidisciplinary partnerships between universities and organisations have emerged to provide professional development opportunities (Ryan 2009). Partnerships between universities and government or not-for-profit organisations are motivated by a desire to align leadership, professionalisation and disciplinary expertise. There are several beneficial functions of these partnerships including improving patient outcomes and healthcare delivery.

The growth of these partnerships coincides with a move in nursing toward a postgraduate level profession and an increasing role in advanced practice care (Rolfe 2012). As such, there are opportunities for university nursing programs to partner with organisations who employ advanced practice nurses

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