

POSITION STATEMENT



ACCCN POSITION STATEMENT ON CRITICAL CARE NURSE EDUCATION (2017)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to all of the critical care nurses who provided input and feedback during the development of this Position Statement

FORWARD

On behalf of the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses I have the pleasure of presenting the ACCCN Position Statement on Critical Care Nurse Education. Education is essential for the development of critical care nursing practice and research. It enhances the quality provision of patient centred care, enables and promotes the self development and esteem of the nurse. It has a significant role in safe working environments.

This position statement not only provides a benchmark for individual continuing professional development but also for the clinical practice learning environment and educational programs for critical care nurses. It aligns with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses. As the peak professional critical care specialist body for Australia, ACCCN is committed to best practice and education for critical care nurses.

A/Prof Diane Chamberlain

ACCCN President

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian College of Critical Care Nurse Limited (ACCCN) is the peak national professional nursing association representing critical care nurses in Australia. The ACCCN considers that appropriate education and preparation of critical care nurses is a vital component for the provision of individualised quality care and support for patients, their families and clinical colleagues. This Position Statement outlines evidence based criteria for critical care nurse education for the Registered Nurse, within a continuous conceptual framework that includes:

- specialist entry level education programs for practice environments where critical care nursing is delivered
- postgraduate level critical care programs (AQF level 8 and 9)
- continuing professional development at the specialist level of critical care nursing practice

BACKGROUND

This Position Statement was developed to provide a leadership position on critical care nurse education. There have been changes to international and Australian principles and approaches to both education and practice standards in general, but in particular to critical care nursing. The ACCCN first published a Position Statement relating to critical care nursing in 1999 titled Postgraduate Critical Care Nursing Education. Following the Declaration of Madrid, a revised statement was published in 2006 titled: Provision of Critical Care Nursing Education. In 2013, the Second Edition Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was implemented and provides policy and regulation for Australian education and enhanced clarity, consistency, comparability and transferability of qualifications. The ACCCN Competency Standards for Specialist Level Critical Care Nurses² were revised and published in 2015 as the Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 1. Further, minimum criteria for an Australian critical care nursing qualification were developed and defined in 2014³.⁴ These statements are to be applied in conjunction with the Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses. This Position Statement provides a contemporary leadership position on critical care nurse education and its provision.

METHOD

This Position Statement is underpinned by research evidence and expert consensus. It was informed by an integrative review of published research and key websites. It was developed in partnership with stakeholders including; health care consumers, ACCCN members and critical care nurse educators employed by health services and education providers in Australia.

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CRITICAL CARE NURSE EDUCATION

CRITICAL CARE NURSES

All critical care nurses should:

- Accept responsibility for their own professional development, embracing the concept of continuous professional development and learning over their career⁵
- Integrate and apply clinical capabilities (knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours) with a sound theoretical knowledge base that promotes and develops critical care nursing and patient care, outcomes and safety⁵
- Work within an defined scope of professional practice⁵
- Contribute to the continuing professional development of others
- Reflect on own critical care practice, and seek out and critically appraise evidence to inform and implement best practice⁵
- Engage in research, quality improvement, and safety projects⁵ to promote excellence in critical care nursing and improve patient and family care, experience and outcomes
- Recognise and actively promote inter-professional and team learning to broaden skill sets and develop a cohesive approach to patient and family care within critical care environments⁷⁻⁹

THE CRITICAL CARE CLINICAL PRACTICE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The clinical practice learning environment is central to critical care nurses' education: it provides the framework for critical care nurse development as a continuum from entry level, through the various transition to practice programs, into critical care environments, post graduate level programs and experiential learning facilitating specialist level critical care practice. Collaboration and partnerships between health care services and universities and education providers are essential to facilitate educational and professional development, research and knowledge translation.

The critical care clinical practice learning environment should utilise:

- The Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses¹ to inform critical care education programs and assessment of clinical practice^{6, 10, 11}
- Promote a person-centred approach to develop a working alliance with patients and their families^{12, 13}
- Recognise that knowledge acquisition is a dynamic process. Critical thinking, problem solving and demonstration of evidenced-based rationales for practice develop incrementally through learning, varied clinical experience and practice exposure¹⁴
- Provide adequate education resources (i.e. professional development time, nurse educator support, educational materials, library and journal database access)^{11, 15}
- Be supported by Health Care Services and Health Departments to provide career incentives to encourage critical care nurses to complete post graduate level critical care programs¹⁵ and higher research degrees

- Be adequately resourced to support and guide critical care nurses at all education levels by appropriately experienced staff^{11, 15, 16}
- Provide preparation, support and facilities for educators, mentors, facilitators and assessors to promote objective assessment, skill transfer and development^{11, 16}
- Enact ethical decision-making and advocate and foster this in others in critical care environments^{6, 14}
- Recognise critical care practice can occur in various practice settings including outreach, liaison and research roles^{6, 14}
- Acknowledge the importance of self-care and welfare for all those providing critical care and promote and develop a resilient and compassionate workforce^{6, 9, 17}

LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR CRITICAL CARE NURSES

Entry level / transition to practice programs

- Health care services and health departments should support all critical care facilities to provide transition to practice or refresher education programs. Such programs should incorporate agreed core competencies, commensurate with critical care services^{6, 18}
- Provision of structured critical care education programs should allow for development of incremental capability development. This includes structured supervised practice⁶

Critical care post graduate level programs

- Postgraduate programs must provide a balance between clinically oriented content and broader graduate skills and qualities¹⁹ that enable the nurse to contribute to the profession. Such curricula should support critical thinking, problem solving, situational awareness, emotional intelligence, socio-emotional support for patients and families, cultural competence, evidence based practice, quality improvement, policy development and leadership^{6, 7, 14, 20-23}
- Close collaboration between education providers and key staff in the critical care practice setting is essential; this should include education providers establishing an external advisory group that includes critical care practice stakeholders, consumer representation and regular program evaluation and review^{6, 11, 24}
- Programs must include an appropriate theoretical component demonstrating the complexity and depth of achievement as identified by the relevant AQF level^{6, 10, 19}
- Supported clinical experience is a vital component to prepare nurses undertaking such programs to meet the ongoing challenges of clinical practice¹¹
- The assessment and integration of clinical capability should be an integral component of programs^{6, 10, 11}
- Minimum practice outcomes for post graduate critical care nurses¹⁹ should be clear and measured using valid and reliable tools and measurement criteria⁶ (for example, the SPECT³)
- The minimum standard for a post graduate critical care qualification is AQF level 8¹⁴
- The minimum course practice outcome is a critical care nurse who can independently provide nursing care for a

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variety of critically ill patients in most contexts, using a patient- and family-focused approach^{6, 7}

SPECIALIST LEVEL CRITICAL CARE PRACTICE

The specialist level domains of critical care practice are professional practice, provision and coordination of care, critical thinking and analysis, collaboration and leadership.^{1, 25}

Critical care nurses should have the opportunity through ongoing personal and professional development to demonstrate specialist practice level. This may be reflected through engagement in:

- Master by coursework or research degree preparation^{26, 27} and/or
- Professional Doctorate or Doctor of Philosophy preparation to build new knowledge through research, implementation and evaluation of evidenced based interventions^{28, 29}
- Significant work related experience and ongoing professional development in critical care practice extending their scope of practice with recognition as an expert critical care nurse by others^{14, 30}
- Leadership development that extends and diversifies critical care and clinical leadership capabilities²⁶
- Development and delivery of programs for staff, patient and family education²⁷
- Analysis, critique and contribution to the development of systems of care within the critical care and broader hospital environment^{27, 31, 32}
- Thinking critically, problem solving and adapting when unprecedented situations emerge including global challenges^{22, 33}
- Contribution to strategic planning and development of critical care services^{22, 31}
- Leadership in professional organisations and forums at a local, state, national and international level²²

SUMMARY

This position statement provides the critical care nurse with a benchmark for professional development, education and research across several domains. These include the individual critical care nurse, the critical care clinical practice learning environment, educational programs for critical care nurses and its relationship to specialist level critical care practice.

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GLOSSARY

Critical care unit:

Definition – A critical care unit is an organised system for the provision of care to critically ill patients that provides intensive and specialised medical and nursing care, an enhanced capacity for monitoring, and multiple modalities of physiologic organ support

to sustain life during a period of acute organ system insufficiency. Although CCUs are based in a defined geographic area of a hospital, its activities often extend beyond the walls of the physical space to include emergency departments, coronary care units, hospital wards, and follow-up clinics⁴⁰

Critically ill patient:

Critical illness refers to an unstable clinical state (actual or potential) of a patient who requires an intensive level of care. The needs of critically ill patients include continuous monitoring and intervention to minimise complications and restore health where possible, and patients with unstable conditions who are at risk of deterioration^{35, 36}

Clinical capability:

Clinical capability in critical care refers to the application of ACCCN practice standards for specialist critical care nurses in complex, unstructured situations³⁴

Clinical facilitator / mentor / preceptor:

A clinical facilitator is a critical care qualified RN who provides teaching and learning guidance and supervision to nurses, predominantly graduate and undergraduate nurses in addition to nurses in the critical care unit, under the direction of an critical care Nurse Educator or University academic³⁵

Nurse educator:

A Nurse Educator is a specialist critical care nurse with a critical care master's degree and who is accountable at an advanced practice level for the design, implementation and assessment of critical care nursing education programs, managing educational resources and providing nursing expertise relating to educational issues in critical care nursing practice³⁵

Entry level programs:

Entry level programs are designed for nurses who have worked with critically ill patients for less than one year. Thus, an entry level critical care nurse might be a recent graduate, or an experienced nurse who had previously worked in acute care or subacute care

Transition to practice program:

An extended orientation program (up to one year) that may incorporate elements of didactic study, integrated case studies, staging of clinical exposure, preceptorship and care-based simulation activities for nurses at entry level to critical care³⁹

Education provider:

Refers to a body that is established or recognised by the Commonwealth or a state or territory government to issue qualifications in the higher education sector. It may be a university, self-accrediting institution or non-self-accrediting institution³⁷

Specialist level of critical care practice:

A nurse at the specialist level of critical care practice is a critical care qualified RN who applies and demonstrates a high level of clinical nursing knowledge, experience and skills in providing complex nursing with minimum direct supervision³⁵

Expert critical care nurse:

An expert critical care nurse in ICU is a critical care qualified RN with at least 5 years' experience post qualification who applies and demonstrates an advanced level of clinical knowledge / skill, critical thinking and leadership related to critical care nursing in the national/international contexts³⁸