



anf position  
statement

# australian nursing federation

## continuing competence

Competence is the combination of demonstrated skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin safe effective and/or superior performance in a profession/occupational area. Continuing competence is the ability of nurses and midwives to demonstrate they have maintained their competence in their current area of practice.<sup>1</sup>

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA), requires nurses and midwives to maintain competence in order to provide quality nursing or midwifery care.

The NMBAs, Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard<sup>2</sup> specifies the number of hours of continuing professional development required by nurses and midwives to retain/renew registration.

Nurses and midwives can only demonstrate competence where they are provided with an environment which facilitates effective, efficient and quality care. Factors which can negatively impact on demonstrating competence are:

- unrealistic performance expectations,
- poor physical layout of the work setting,
- staffing which is inadequate in number and inappropriate in skill level and mix,
- lack of supplies, services and other resources,
- unsafe practices of other health care professionals,
- lack of written policies or standards to provide direction and support for nursing and/or midwifery practice, or
- conflict between health professionals.

Self-assessment of competence is an ongoing process whereby nurses and midwives examine their practice against national competency standards<sup>3</sup> required by the NMBA for registration and enrolment.

Self-assessment should include reflection, critical incident analysis, peer review and evaluation of client and patient outcomes. Peer review of nursing and midwifery competence, although not mandatory under the National Registration Standard, is an objective assessment of performance against national competency standards for nurses or midwives.

It is the position of the Australian Nursing Federation that:

1. All nurses and midwives have a responsibility to provide high quality, safe and competent nursing and/or midwifery care to the community.

2. All nurses and midwives have a professional responsibility to maintain their competence and to have a contemporary knowledge and skill base in order to deliver safe nursing and/or midwifery care.
3. Individual nurses, midwives, professional organisations, the NMBA, employers, educational institutions and governments share the responsibility to ensure competency standards are maintained
4. Nurses and midwives may apply a process of regular self-assessment or peer review as the basis for determining their continuing competence to practice and identification of learning needs.
5. Nurses and midwives may base their self-assessment on a variety of methods to maintain competence and improve practice, including formal and informal learning; participation in and use of evidence based practice and research; other professional development activities; and reflection on workplace performance appraisals.
6. Measures to achieve continuing competence may include, but should not be limited to: evaluation of professional competence against relevant professional competency standards; workplace performance appraisal; attendance at a relevant conference, seminar and/or staff development session; relevant post graduate educational courses; maintaining professional knowledge through professional literature and research; participation in mandatory education (such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation or drug calculation); and membership of a professional and/or industrial organisation.
7. Nurses and midwives competency assessment should only be conducted by nurses and midwives with similar or advanced clinical expertise in the practice setting in which the nurse or midwife is to be assessed.
8. The assessing of nursing or midwifery competence requires knowledge of the professional and registration standards and the context in which the nurse or midwife practices.
9. Nurses and midwives should demonstrate a commitment to continuing competence through life-long learning.
10. Nurses and midwives should seek quality educational experiences relevant to their area of practice or professional interest.
11. Employers should provide nurses and midwives with support (financial and/or time off) and access to learning opportunities in a range of settings including providing education facilities in the workplace, online, and via other distance education methods at work.
12. Nurses and midwives should support each other in demonstrating and maintaining competence for nursing and midwifery practice.

13. Nurses and midwives who identify competency deficits in their practice should be given the support to formulate a professional development plan in collaboration with their employer to address these.
14. Nurses and midwives need to document continuing professional development activities in accordance with the requirements of the NMBAs<sup>2</sup>, *Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard*.

*endorsed august 2007*

*reviewed and re-endorsed november 2010*

#### references

- 1 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council. 2006. Continuing competence in nursing and midwifery. Position statement available at:  
[http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/May\\_06\\_Continuing\\_Competence\\_in\\_Nursing\\_and\\_Midwifery.pdf](http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/May_06_Continuing_Competence_in_Nursing_and_Midwifery.pdf).  
(this address will be updated when we find where this is now sited)
- 2 Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (2010) Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard. Available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/registration-Standards.aspx>
3. See <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-and-Guidelines.aspx> for the national competency standards for registered nurses, midwives, enrolled nurses and nurse practitioners.

This position statement should be read in conjunction with the ANF position statements:

- Management of nursing and midwifery services (2009)
- Resolution of nursing and midwifery practice concerns in the workplace (2009).