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joint position statement

Assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled)¹

Purpose

This position statement has been prepared jointly by the Australian Nursing Federation and Royal College of Nursing, Australia.

This position statement may assist the nursing profession, employers, governments and consumers to clarify the relationship between registered and enrolled nurses² and assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled)³ in the provision of safe, competent and ethical health care. It may assist employers who have a responsibility for providing appropriately qualified and skilled staff to meet the individual's nursing care needs following assessment by a registered nurse.

The purpose of this position statement is also to give direction and guidance to registered and enrolled nurses so that they can clarify roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in their relationship with assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) when either delegating aspects of nursing care or when providing nursing care to people receiving assistance with their care from assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled). Assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) may also receive guidance and clarification from this position statement in their relationships with registered and enrolled nurses.

Background

Nursing takes a holistic rather than task oriented approach to health care and includes the physical, mental and emotional care of the person. While focussing on the person requiring care, nursing is inclusive of the person's family and friends.

Registered and enrolled nurses are regulated by specific legislation and regulation in order to protect the health and safety of the public. Nurse regulatory authorities maintain and promote professional standards of nursing practice by all nurses licensed in that jurisdiction.

There are two categories of nurse licensed by state and territory nurse regulatory authorities. They are registered nurses and enrolled nurses. Enrolled nurses work under the supervision and direction of registered nurses. Registered nurses can delegate nursing care to other registered or enrolled nurses. In some jurisdictions, aspects of nursing care may also be delegated by registered nurses to assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled), however the registered nurse must supervise all delegated activities.

Nurses should refer to relevant state and territory legislation in order to establish whether there is specific guidance or direction in relation to matters dealt with in this statement, particularly in relation to supervision and delegation. Nurses should also refer to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia.

¹ The ANF recommends that this position statement is read in conjunction with the ANF policy, *Assistants in Nursing and other Unlicensed Workers Providing Nursing Care*, and the ANF *Guidelines for Delegation by Registered Nurses*.

² In the State of Victoria, registered nurses are titled Registered Nurse Division 1 and enrolled nurses are titled Registered Nurse Division 2.

³ This is a generic term to describe such classifications as assistants in nursing and personal care assistants.

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Principles

Principle 1 – Assessment

Registered nurses undertake the initial and ongoing assessments of nursing care needs.

Explanatory Statement

The comprehensive educational preparation of registered nurses provides the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to carry out assessment, planning, delivery, delegation, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of nursing care. Enrolled nurses contribute to nursing assessment, planning, delivery and ongoing monitoring of people receiving nursing care in accordance with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council's competency standards for the enrolled nurse.

Principle 2 – Delegation

Following assessment by registered nurses, assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) may be delegated aspects of nursing care, in some care settings and in some jurisdictions, to assist registered nurses and enrolled nurses in the delivery of nursing care.

Explanatory Statement

The registered nurse is responsible for delegation decisions. Assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) may assist registered nurses during the assessment process and in the delivery of nursing care in some settings and in some jurisdictions. Registered nurses retain overall responsibility for any aspects of nursing care delegated. Nursing care settings in which assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) may be employed are varied but are primarily in community settings, residential aged care, and disability services.

Principle 3 – Supervision

Registered nurses supervise⁴, either directly or indirectly, aspects of nursing care delegated to assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled).

Explanatory Statement

Registered nurses are responsible for supervising all delegated activities. Whether supervision is direct or indirect, depends on the acuity of the person requiring care, complexity of the delegated activities, and the level of training, competence and experience of the assistant in nursing or other unlicensed worker (however titled).

The registered nurse delegating the care makes the decision as to whether the supervision is direct or indirect. In some jurisdictions enrolled nurses may also supervise assistants in nursing or other unlicensed workers (however titled).

⁴ Direct supervision: the registered nurse is actually present, observes, works with and directs the person who is being supervised.

Indirect supervision: the registered nurse is easily contactable but does not directly observe the activities. (from ANC 2003 *Guidelines on Delegation and Supervision for Nurses*).

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Principle 4 – Education

Assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) should have undertaken relevant education and training consistent with Level III of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Explanatory Statement

In order to provide safe and competent care all assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) must have undertaken the level of education and training considered necessary for their role. Employers should support and encourage assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) to achieve the necessary education and training or to have commensurate experience and competence formally recognised.

Principle 5 – Competence

The aspects of nursing care that can be undertaken by assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) must be consistent with their level of education, training and competence, and the level of acuity and stability of the person requiring care.

Explanatory Statement

The aspects of nursing care undertaken by assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) is determined by registered nurses having regard to that worker's: degree of educational preparation and demonstrated competence; the acuity of the person requiring care and the complexity of the care; and, the context in which the care is being provided.

Principle 6 – Accountability

Assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) remain accountable for their own actions and are responsible to registered nurses and employers for all delegated activities.

Explanatory Statement

The registered nurse is responsible for delegation decisions and for supervising the assistant in nursing or other unlicensed worker (however titled) while they are performing delegated aspects of nursing care. Registered nurses retain overall responsibility for any aspects of nursing care delegated. The employer is responsible for the provision of services and for setting the policy framework in which the service is provided. The assistant in nursing or other unlicensed worker (however titled) is responsible for performing the delegated aspects of nursing care in accordance with policy and they are answerable to the registered nurse and the employer for the performance of those aspects of care.

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Principle 7 – Right to Know

People receiving nursing care and their families have the right to know the name, designation, qualifications and role of the worker who is involved in their care, and, who is supervising them.

Explanatory Statement

People receiving nursing care and their families must have access to information about the skills and expertise of all workers (however titled) involved in their care.

Principle 8 – Employer’s Responsibility

Employers must provide clear policies and protocols within which assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) function, having regard to the provision of safe care, the legal requirements within the particular jurisdiction care is being provided, and the educational preparation of the assistant in nursing and other unlicensed worker (however titled).

Explanatory Statement

Employers have a non-delegable duty of care to provide an environment in which safe care can be delivered by workers (however titled) who have the necessary education and training.