ACCCN Position Statement (2006) on the Provision of Critical Care Nursing Education

The Australian College of Critical Care Nurse Limited (ACCCN) considers that appropriate preparation of specialist critical care nurses is a vital component for the provision of quality care to patients and their families. This position statement outlines the recommendations of ACCCN regarding the provision of critical care nursing education. Where possible these recommendations are based on evidence from research in critical care nursing and allied fields. In areas where current research-based evidence is not available, these recommendations are based on the opinion of expert nurses in the field of critical care nursing in Australia.

1. Programs preparing critical care nurses to function at a specialist level of practice should be provided at a postgraduate level and conducted by a higher education provider (for example, a university or equivalent provider).

2. The curricula of Australian critical care nursing postgraduate courses must provide an appropriate theoretical and clinical experience to prepare nurses to meet the challenges of clinical practice effectively.

3. ACCCN considers the Competency Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses developed by ACCCN could be utilised to inform critical care curriculum development and assessment of clinical practice.

4. ACCCN endorses the recommendations of the 2005 Declaration of Madrid on the preparation of critical care nurse in relation to curriculum content.

5. Postgraduate courses for critical care nurses must provide a balance between clinically oriented content and broader generic content that enables the specialist nurse to contribute to the profession through processes such as research, practice development and leadership.

6. There is a pressing need for the establishment of consensus among education providers, health care providers and critical care clinicians on the desirable outcomes of critical care courses.

7. Graduates of postgraduate courses in critical care must be able to demonstrate clinical competence as well as a sound theoretical knowledge base. A strong emphasis on the application of theory to practice, and the assessment of clinical competence should be an integral component of postgraduate critical care courses.

8. The provision of appropriate experience to facilitate the development of clinical competence should be a collaborative responsibility between education and health care providers. Critical care students should have access to support and guidance from appropriately experienced staff such as clinical teachers and nurse preceptors.

9. Clinical teachers and nurse preceptors for postgraduate critical care students should be appropriately supported in their role by both education and health care providers.

10. Close collaboration between the health care and higher education sectors is important in order that postgraduate critical care nursing education is provided at a standard that meets the expectations of both sectors.

11. Critical care education providers should have in place policies and processes for recognition of prior learning and alternative flexible entry pathways into postgraduate specialist courses.

12. Health care and higher education providers should establish strategies to reduce the significant financial burden faced by nurses undertaking postgraduate critical care courses.
13. Health care providers and Health Departments should implement suitable strategies that provide financial or career incentives that will encourage critical care nurses to complete postgraduate critical care courses.

14. Education providers should implement educational strategies to facilitate flexible access to postgraduate critical care courses for nurses from a range of geographical locations.

15. Innovative strategies need to be implemented to address the deficit of qualified critical care nurses. Such strategies may include comprehensive critical care workforce planning, innovative retention strategies, refresher or re-entry critical care education, professional development programs and the provision of greater support for nurses undertaking postgraduate critical care courses.

16. Providers of short critical care training courses should seek credit transfer within the higher education sector for nurses completing these courses.

As a minimum, the critical care dimensions of the following subject areas should be included in critical care education programs to prepare critical care nurses.

- anatomy and physiology
- psychosocial aspects, including cultural and spiritual beliefs
- pathophysiology
- technology applications
- pharmacology
- caring for the carer, including debriefing, stress management and peer support
- clinical assessment (including diagnostic and laboratory results)
- patient and family education
- illnesses and alterations of vital body functions
- legal and ethical issues
- plans of care and nursing interventions
- professional nursing roles in critical care including clinical teaching strategies, team leadership and management issues
- medical indications and prescriptions, with resulting nursing care responsibilities
- use of current research findings to deliver evidence based multidisciplinary care
- responding to clinical emergencies
- global critical care perspectives

References

1. Australian College of Critical Care Nurses Ltd. Competency standards for specialist critical care nurses. 2002
2. Australian College of Critical Care Nurses Ltd 1999 Position Statement on Postgraduate Critical Care Nursing Education