

*Editorial***AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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Well, winter is nearly past and we are now moving into spring. Here in Queensland we are still desperate for rain, but are told that it is coming soon.

Nursing in Australia now seems to be attracting attention in a way it has not done so before. From a federal perspective, whilst we still have no action on the two reviews of nursing published in 2002, we have achieved some wins in the last federal budget. For example, there have been set aside more places in universities for nursing in 2004 (these places are only for regional universities) and an increase in the funding for clinical placements. These initiatives are a start, however, a lot more is needed to be effective. For example, in the [1999 nursing labour force data](#) released by the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) (2003) indicate:

- An overall increase in workload in the hospital setting (measured by number of hospital separations) – from 5.3 million in 1995-96 to 6.0 million in 1999-2000;
- There was a slight increase (0.5%) in the number of nurses registered and enrolled in Australia since 1997, however the numbers were still lower than in 1993;
- The overall increase in the number of employed nurses was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of nurses working part-time, from 46.8% in 1993 to 53.8% in 1999 and a decrease in average hours worked per week from 32.2 hours to 30.3 hours.
- The nursing workforce is ageing. For example, between 1993 and 1999 the average age of nurses rose from 39.5 years to 41.6 years;
- The number of Australian students completing basic nursing studies decreased from 6397 in 1993 to 4465 in 2000;
- The number of Australian students commencing basic nursing studies decreased from 8010 in 1993 to 7195 in 2000.

In Australia, however, it is usually the state/territory governments or private employers who are the main employers of nursing. Hence, nursing has not had a nationally focused plan. Instead, each state/territory has introduced varying schemes to attract and retain nurses. As many nurse leaders in Australia have said, there is no point in increasing the number of nurse graduates if the workforce conditions are so poor that they do not remain in nursing.

On a positive note, the introduction of nurse practitioners in Australia is now progressing well. Here in Queensland, where things move more slowly – maybe it is the tropical weather, we have just completed the trials for nurse practitioners. The final report is at present with the Director General of Health, so I am unable to provide details of

recommendations. It is unlikely, however, that Queensland will not follow the other states and introduce models of nurse practitioners.

With regard to nursing research, again there is beginning to be a greater interest shown in clinical research by nurse clinicians. One needs to remember that the majority of our nurse clinicians have trained under a hospital program, where we were taught to be obedient and not question the wisdom of other nurses, medical practitioners or allied health professionals. Fortunately this has changed and exciting research which is driven by the needs of the clinicians is increasingly being carried out. For example, at the University of Southern Queensland, we have just completed a partnership with the Toowoomba Health Service where we have become a collaborating centre of the Joanna Briggs Institute for Evidence Based Practice. We have held a workshop for those clinicians interested, and now come up with five topics which the clinicians believe should be the focus of a systematic review. Whilst those in the United States might have been undertaking this sort of activity for years, it is really exciting to see research interest in our rural nurses.

As I sit in my office and look at the gum trees swaying in the breeze and note the magpies and parrots holding on, I realize that soon the westerly winds which we experience at this time of the year will pass, as will the colder weather we have had during winter. I always feel so hopeful at this time of year as trees begin to bud swell and burst into flower; the winter-sown wheat crops begin to mature; and there is an abundance of lambs and calves in the paddocks. I think about my colleagues on the other side of the world who are probably looking at leaves colouring and falling and beginning to experience the loss of the sun to the Southern Hemisphere. Never mind, we will share it with you again in six months time!!