

Editorial

WHAT'S HAPPENING DOWN UNDER!

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I would like to take the opportunity to introduce myself and to thank Jeri Dunkin for asking me to be involved with the Journal. My name is Professor Karen Francis and I am a rural nurse located in Australia. I am an academic employed by Monash University which is located in the State of Victoria on the eastern side of the nation. I am the Head of the Monash rural School of Nursing and Midwifery, and I am an active researcher who is interested in education, workforce and the management of chronic disease. I have been an advocate for rural nursing and midwifery since the early 1990s when Professor Desley Hegney established the Australian Association of Rural Nurses.

In this inaugural report I have chosen to report on two major issues that have significant implications for nurses and midwives in Australia particularly for those working and living in rural environments. 2010 is a federal election year which may result in a change in leadership and the management of the nation. Any change creates levels of tension among the population and within the political parties aspiring for success. Government elections provide valuable windows of opportunity for individuals, groups and organisations to influence policy. There is a great deal of political lobbying occurring with stakeholders aligning with political parties and candidates who appear to be paying attention to their vested interests. Coupled with the growing frenzy surrounding the lead up to the Federal election, nurses and midwives are preparing for a monumental change in the regulation of the profession.

Federal Election

Australians are being bombarded by new and rehashed, controversial and expected policy statements from the current Government and shadow Government as the country gears up for the federal election that will be held later this year. As usual, health, education and climate control are major agenda items. The current government is introducing what they see as a radical health care reform prior to the election in accordance with an electoral promise made prior to the last Federal election: 'improving the health care system'. This reform involves the transfer of responsibility for funding hospitals from State/Territory Governments to the Federal Government. It is expected that this initiative will reduce disparity between the various jurisdictions in terms of the numbers and types of clinical health care services provided and the geographic location of these. There is some concern that rural and remote communities may be compromised if the Government adopts a population based formulae to operationalise health care services. Professional and industrial organisations including nursing, medicine and allied health are lobbying for 'rurality' to be a significant consideration in this initiative and for planning models to be transparent and provided for comment and modification prior to implementation.

National Regulation and Accreditation

In Australia currently, each State/Territory has independent regulatory authorities with jurisdiction based Statutory Acts that define practice. While nurses and midwives may licence in any jurisdiction other than the one in which they initially licensed there are

additional associated costs and the process is cumbersome and sometimes quite lengthy. Moreover, there are some differences in pre-service curriculum content, registers, expectations regarding currency of practice and scopes of practice. From the 1st July 2010 Australian Nurses and Midwives will licence for practice with a single regulatory authority, The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Board. A single regulatory authority will ensure that pre-service curriculum for nursing and midwifery is consistent and that practice is common across the nation. For nurses and midwives who work near jurisdictional borders the impost of having to licence in two or three jurisdictions will cease. It is anticipated that this initiative will assist the nursing and midwifery workforce to have greater mobility.

Times, they are a changing! I am extremely supportive of the national regulatory body and have my fingers crossed that the health system reforms will improve service delivery.