



Parliament of Australia *Joint Standing Committee on Migration.*

Review of Australia's Skilled Labour Migration and Temporary Entry Programs

Submission from the Australian Nursing Council.

Background

The Australian Nursing Council (ANC) is a peak national body concerned with the development of national standards in relation to statutory nurse regulation. Each of the eight state and territory nurse regulatory authorities are represented on Council and provide the funding for Council.

The Council has developed national nurse competency standards for registered and enrolled nurses which have been accepted by all nurse regulatory authorities as the basis for registration. All nurses are required to demonstrate these competencies in order to gain registration. Nurses are also required to declare competence in order to maintain their license and proof of competence may be required at any time. ANC has also developed the national Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct for Australian nurses.

One of the objects of Council is to undertake assessments of overseas qualified nurses consistent with the registration and/or enrolment requirements of the Australian nurse regulatory authorities. ANC has also been gazetted by the Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs to undertake the skills assessment for overseas nurses applying for migration under the General Skilled Migration Category.

A positive skills assessment from ANC enables a nurse to gain points towards the required points for migration.

The standards and criteria used by ANC to assesses the qualifications of overseas nurses are consistent with the recognition policies for registration of nurses across all jurisdictions in Australia and also New Zealand. A committee of the ANC – the Collaborative Advisory Panel, has developed consistent standards and policies for recognition of overseas nurses across Australia and New Zealand. Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition legislation enables nurses registered in either country to gain immediate registration in Australia or New Zealand. Therefore overseas nurses who have gained registration in New Zealand are able to gain immediate registration in Australia without meeting other requirements. A memorandum of co-operation has been signed between the Nursing Council of New Zealand and

the Australian Nursing Council and confirms the close relationship between the two countries in the development of standards for statutory regulation.

Meeting standards for registration and migration.

Overseas nurses are required to be work ready in order to be suitable for migration to Australia. This means nurses must meet the requirements for registration before they are assessed as suitable for migration. The standards to be met for registration are the same as for nurses who have completed their nursing education programs in Australia and these are:

- Completion of a nursing education program recognised by the Australian nurse regulatory authorities
- Demonstration of English language proficiency
- Demonstration of the ANC National Competency Standards for Registered Nurses.

There are also other requirements regarding mental and physical competence and Good Character.

In order to meet these requirements overseas nurses may be required to demonstrate English language proficiency by undertaking an English language test and successfully complete a competency based assessment program in Australia. The competency based assessment programs consist of both theory and clinical practice modules.

Comments by ANC in relation to the Terms of Reference

1. International Competition for Nurses

There is a worldwide shortage of nurses and this includes Australia. A number of strategies have been implemented by state and territory governments, employers and professional organisations in Australia to attract nurses back into the workforce and also to encourage people to study nursing.

Employment of overseas nurses is also a strategy used, by Australia and many other developed countries, to help fill nursing vacancies and is a strategy that has been for many years. Nurses have always been a mobile population, choosing to gain experience in other countries for 2 or 3 years.

However aggressive recruitment of overseas nurses by many countries including Australia is now occurring. As stated by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) in their position statement on Ethical Nurse Recruitment: -

A Complex Web of contributing factors generates the emerging global nursing shortage. The current situation, characterised by an increasing demand and a decreasing supply, results in heightened competition for the nursing human resources available, both within and among countries. As a short-term strategy, countries or health care facilities have regarded international migration as a possible solution. Examples are not limited to the industrialised countries but also include recruitment among developing countries.

Therefore there is competition amongst all countries to attract nurses from other countries.

Until recently nurses from the Philippines were the second highest group of applicants for assessment of qualifications for the purposes of migration to Australia. However the numbers of nurses from the Philippines applying for assessment of their qualifications has fallen. It is understood that many are now migrating to the USA and the United Kingdom. Both countries are actively recruiting nurses from the Philippines and may make it easier for these nurses to enter the country in order to gain nursing qualifications. The nurse regulatory authorities and ANC require nurses from the Philippines to meet both the English language and competence requirement in order to gain registration and then migration.

In Australia the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) has introduced priority processing of visa applications from nurses and has included nurses on the Migration Occupation in Demand List (MODL) which enables nurses to gain more points towards migration.

Nurses who are required to complete a competency based assessment program in Australia, and as a result gain registration with a state or territory nurses board, are able to apply for migration whilst still onshore provided they are sponsored by an employer under the employer nomination scheme or the regional sponsored migration scheme.

The Australian Nursing Council and the State and Territory Nurse Regulatory Authorities have ensured that policies regarding the recognition of overseas nurses are nationally consistent.

Ethical Recruitment

The ANC receives many calls from employers, overseas government representatives, migration agents and ordinary citizens requesting information in order to assist the migration of large numbers of nurses from countries such as India, China, Poland, Libya, Indonesia and the Philippines. The numbers quoted range from 60 to 1000. Such requests raise the possibility of exploitation by unscrupulous agents. Therefore ANC supports the International Council of Nurses (ICN) position statement on Ethical Nurse Recruitment and the Draft Commonwealth Code of Practice for International Recruitment of Health Workers. Both of these documents outline ethical principles and ideals for recruitment of nurses.

2. The Degree to which Quality Permanent Skilled Migrants are being attracted to Australia and Settling Well.

Overseas nurses who meet the requirements for registration and migrate to Australia are able to gain employment. In many cases overseas nurses have been offered employment before they arrive in Australia.

In some cases it takes time for some nurses to be able to competently practice in the Australian health care environment due to cultural differences. However given our multicultural society it is essential that nurses from other cultures are incorporated into the health care system.

Conclusion.

In general the Australian Nursing Council finds the present system of skilled migration satisfactory.