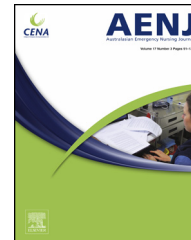




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RESEARCH PAPER

Practice standards for emergency nursing: An international review



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KEYWORDS

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Review;
Standards

Summary

Background: Presentations to emergency departments (EDs) and patient acuity continue to increase. Whilst strategies to deliver safe patient care in the ED are evolving, emergency nurses need to be well educated through specialist qualifications to enable delivery of advanced patient care. This paper presents a comparative analysis of available international practice and competency standards for nurses graduating from emergency nursing courses in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Methods: CINAHL, Scopus, Ovid MEDLINE, and Embase were searched for papers, published in English, using the terms: 'emergency', 'accident and emergency', 'nursing', 'competency', 'practice standards', 'scope of practice', 'regulation', and 'specialist standards'. Secondary sources from relevant reference lists and professional websites were also searched.

Results: The standards from the five countries were common across five domains: clinical expertise, communication, teamwork, resources and environment, and legal. None of the standards were specific to the emergency nursing graduate, and there was variability in the level of expertise required for which the standards apply.

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Conclusions: The available practice standards demonstrated some commonality. Consideration of the utility of a universal framework for informing the development of emergency nursing practice standards and emergency nursing curriculum for nurses wishing to specialise is needed.

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What is known

- Emergency departments are dynamic environments that need a skilled workforce to ensure safe patient care.
- Practice standards provide a benchmark to inform and guide clinical performance for emergency nurses.
- There is a lack of guidance from healthcare regulatory authorities and/or organisations about how graduate education programs should be best constituted to prepare emergency nurses to work to their full scope of practice.
- There has been no published comparison of practice standards for emergency nursing internationally.

What this paper adds?

- A comparison of emergency nursing practice and competency standards from five countries revealed similarities in regards to clinical expertise, communication, teamwork, resources and environment, and legal standards.
- The standards for each country differed according to expected graduate attributes and scope of practice.
- The development and implementation of practice standards for nurses graduating from emergency nursing courses would provide a framework to support the ongoing advancement of emergency nursing roles and guide safe nursing practice.
- Ongoing research into the development of practice standards for nurses graduating from emergency nursing courses is still required to assist managers, educators and clinicians to develop standards for emergency nursing practice.

Introduction

The emergency department (ED) is a busy, unpredictable, and dynamic environment.^{1,2} The number of patients who present for treatment and care continues to increase.^{3,4} In Australia there has been an annual rise of ED presentations of approximately 2.9% over the past five years (2009–2014), with close to 7.2 million presentations during 2013–2014.⁵ Similar increases have been documented globally.^{6,7} Internationally, the challenges experienced by EDs include not only the increasing volume of patients, but also their acuity, diminishing resources and bed access within individual hospitals, the skill mix of staff, and country specific key performance indicators (KPIs).^{1,8–10} The patient experience

and quality of care they receive are directly related to the team that deliver the care, and in particular the role of the emergency nurse. The preparation of emergency nurses who complete graduate level emergency nursing courses, however, has been somewhat neglected in the literature.

Emergency nurses require a breadth and depth of basic and advanced skills across the patient lifespan to meet the challenging situations that arise in ED.^{1,2,11,12} The clinical practice environment and the skill mix of medical and nursing staff often guide competent and safe care.^{13–16} Many argue that there is a blurring of medical and nursing roles within the ED, and consequently the theoretical underpinnings and skills training required in graduate ED nursing education are difficult to determine.^{15–19} In Australia, the scope of practice of emergency nursing has progressed to include advanced practice roles, such as emergency nurse practitioners,^{1,20} which demands further educational preparedness beyond an initial bachelor of nursing qualification for registration. In the United States an advanced practice nurse role in the ED requires the individual to hold a clinical masters or doctoral degree.²⁰ Internationally there are no uniform guidelines that direct the level of education that is required to work in advanced practice nursing roles in the ED.

There has been limited published research examining the clinical performance expectations of emergency nurses, and their scope of practice, following specialist post-degree education. Competency and practice standards for emergency nursing exist in some jurisdictions. Indeed, many countries have national emergency nursing organisations that aim to provide guidance and support for the expanded role of emergency nurses. Countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States have published their emergency nursing practice or competency standards on their relevant websites.^{21–25} Additionally there are many well regarded courses around the world that nurses complete to improve their delivery of emergency care, such as the Trauma Nursing Core Course (TNCC), however the extent to which course content reflects standards of practice for emergency nursing is not evident in the literature.

Throughout this paper the term 'graduate' refers to emergency nursing 'graduates'. The term graduate denotes an individual who has completed a tertiary (university) course or program after their bachelor degree.²⁶ A 'graduate' course or program refers to an accredited course of study that aims to prepare a clinician for specialist or advanced practice. The pathways and titles for graduate qualifications in emergency nursing vary between countries. In Australia it is common for emergency nurses to complete a Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or Masters level qualification in emergency nursing, which are delivered in the tertiary (university) sector. The Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are designed to extend the individual's

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