

# Early Graduate Nurse Program Guidelines 2009

*Nurse Policy: Building capacity and capability in the Victorian nursing workforce.*

## Background

To provide guidance to health services about the structure and content of **Early Graduate Nurse Programs** the following seven principles have been identified from the current literature, consultation with industry and review of current practice. Together the seven principles provide a non-prescriptive framework of the key conditions and criteria that influence the capacity of new graduate to function safely and efficiently and to continue to develop professionally. The approach considers the needs and resources of a broad range of health services providing programs. Also provided are examples of program content that best reflects the underpinning principle and might be included in a best practice Early Graduate Program.

## Principles for Victorian Early Graduate Nurse Programs

The following principles underpin Early Graduate Nurse Programs:

- Best practice EGPs are delivered in organisations that value learning, professional development, evidence based practice and research.
- Best practice EGPs thrive in an organisational culture that values nurses, their contribution to client care and service delivery and the role of the early graduate in the health team.
- Best practice EGPs are provided in a safe and supportive work environment that complies with principles of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.
- Best practice EGPs are planned learning and professional development experiences that address both early graduate and workplace needs.
- Best practice EGPs are based on the understanding that early graduates have been prepared through their tertiary qualifications for beginner level practice. As such, early graduates require access to more experienced nurses and midwives as preceptors for supervision, direction and instruction
- Best practice EGPs adopt a holistic approach that considers professional, social and whole of life issues.
- Best practice EGPs are integrally linked to the organisation's quality, safety and risk management frameworks.

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## PRINCIPLE 1: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE PLANNED LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES THAT ADDRESS BOTH EARLY GRADUATE AND WORKPLACE NEEDS.

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>Early graduates require appropriate induction and orientation to the Health Service</p> <p>Graduates often benefit from an individual assessment of learning needs</p> <p>Learning contracts can be a useful tool to assist the graduate to identify their learning needs.</p> <p>The program should provide a dedicated co-ordinator who is available to early graduates.</p> <p>Allocation of clinical rotations at the beginning of the program allows for planning for the health service and the graduate.</p> <p>The program should provide structure and content. The structure might consist of study days, inservice and supernumerary time.</p> <p>Content might include advanced clinical skills, priority setting, time management and coping skills</p> <p>The program may include ongoing performance reviews.</p> <p>Early graduate programs currently have fewer rotations to assist the graduates to develop skills and confidence</p> <p>Most early graduate programs aim to deliver the most support at the front end of the program.</p> <p>The program may be designed to encourage critical thinking both in study days and the clinical setting.</p>	<p>Health Services should ensure that the program provides for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supernumerary time.</li> <li>• appointment of a dedicated program coordinator</li> <li>• maintaining manageable workloads for graduates</li> <li>• planning to ensure suitable opportunities for graduates to develop further knowledge</li> </ul> <p>Recent research suggests that increasing specialisation within healthcare increases the time it takes to become a working member of the team. Consequently, fewer clinical rotations within the program may assist the graduate to develop skill, confidence and feel part of the team.</p> <p>Concept mapping has been used successfully as an educational strategy to improve critical thinking skills in new graduates.</p>
<h3>REFERENCES (1)</h3>	
<p>Australian Resource Centre for Healthcare Innovations (ARCHI), <i>Strengthening the new graduate nurse program using learning contracts</i>, viewed 9 January 2009, <a href="http://www.archi.net.au/e-library/workforce/nursing/strengthening_graduate.htm">http://www.archi.net.au/e-library/workforce/nursing/strengthening_graduate.htm</a>&gt;</p> <p>McKenna, L. and Newton, J.M, <i>After the graduate year: a phenomenological exploration of how new nurses develop their knowledge and skill over the first 18 months following graduation</i>. Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing,, 2005. <b>25</b>(4): p. 9-15.</p> <p>Beecroft, P.C., et al., <i>Bridging the Gap Between School and Workplace: Developing a New Graduate Nurse Curriculum</i>. Journal of Nursing Administration, 2004. <b>34</b>(7-8): p. 338-345.</p> <p>Bishop, R 2005, <i>Building Talent for the future workforce</i>, Interdependent, <a href="http://www.interdependent.com.au.htm">http://www.interdependent.com.au.htm</a></p> <p>Halfer D Graf E <i>Graduate perceptions of the work experience</i>. Nursing Economics 2006 vol 24 (3) p150-155</p> <p>Gaynor L et al <i>Where do all the undergraduate and new graduate nurses go and why? A search for empirical evidence</i>. Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing 2006 Vol 24 (2)p26-32</p>	

**PRINCIPLE 2: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS THRIVE IN A ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE THAT VALUES NURSES THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO CLIENT CARE AND SERVICE DELIVERY AND THE ROLE OF THE GRADUATE IN THE HEALTH TEAM.**

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>Maintaining high standards of nursing care is a key factor in promoting job satisfaction in early graduates.</p> <p>Early graduates require an appropriate induction and orientation to the health service</p> <p>Providers of EGP should encourage all staff to utilise the differences in nursing knowledge and staff expertise, including the early graduates, for the benefit of the patient</p> <p>Providing clear well documented accessible policies and procedures are fundamental to the provision of a safe environment. This includes the clear role description for the graduate nurse.</p> <p>Provision of best practice guidelines for rostering of early graduates and timing of night duty and holidays across the year should be considered.</p>	<p>Organisational culture greatly influences the learning environment. Factors that influence the clinical learning environments are staffing levels, preparation of clinical teachers and their skill levels, allocation of nursing educators, and cultural attitudes to ongoing staff education.</p> <p>A welcome environment with a well-planned orientation program designed specifically for early graduates enables graduates to feel valued.</p> <p>It has been suggested that role ambiguity occurs when the graduate's role is ill defined. This may occur between wards/units where the lack of clarity affects staff expectations and can cause conflict.</p> <p>Organisations that provide career assistance can assist employees' to focus on career development and can bind them more closely to an organisation.</p> <p>Treating the early graduates as part of the team enhances the early graduates professional self-concept and image, assisting them in their competence.</p>

**REFERENCES (2)**

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- Bishop, R 2005, *Building Talent for the future workforce*, Interdependent, <http://www.interdependent.com.au.htm>
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**PRINCIPLE 3: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE BASED ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT EARLY GRADUATES ARE PREPARED THROUGH THEIR TERTIARY QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEGINNING LEVEL PRACTICE.**

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>Best practice early graduate programs provide supportive environments with mentors and preceptors</p> <p>Mentors and preceptors assist the graduate in exhibiting professional behaviours.</p> <p>Mentoring increases professional behaviours exhibited by graduates and gives graduates the confidence to transition beyond beginner level practice.</p> <p>Mentoring assists graduates to identify opportunities to take leadership and expanding roles in the organisation.</p> <p>Preceptoring increases the retention of graduates in the current workplace.</p> <p>Mentors and preceptors assist graduates to appropriately choose ongoing professional development.</p>	<p>Research discovered that many graduate programs were designed on the premise that university preparation was inadequate. This premise hindered the transition process of graduates undertaking the program.</p> <p>Further work revealed that supportive environments are equally important in assisting the graduate to transition and to function as part of the team.</p> <p>Preceptors should have a clear understanding of how learning occurs and an ability to facilitate critical thinking and skill development</p> <p>It has been suggested that mentoring programs help to instil lifelong learning in the graduates and increase their ability to be responsive to change, to be reflective in practice and to be information literate.</p>
<p><b>REFERENCES (3)</b></p>	
<p>Evans, J and Boxer, E and Dr Sanber, S, <i>The strengths and weaknesses of transitional support programs for newly registered nurses</i>, Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, 2006 vol.25, no.4, pp. 16-22.</p> <p>Lea J, Cruickshank.M., 2007 <i>The experience of the new graduate nurses in rural practice in New South Wales</i>, in <i>The international electronic journal</i>, Journal of Rural and Remote Health, <a href="http://www.rrh.org.au.htm">http://www.rrh.org.au.htm</a></p> <p>Persaud D <i>Mentoring the new graduate peri-operative nurse a valuable retention strategy</i> AORN journal 2008 87 (6) p 1173-1179</p> <p>Wolters Kluwer Health, Nursing Management, <i>From novice to expert: Transitioning graduate nurses</i>, viewed 15 December 2008, <a href="http://ovid.tx.ovid.com/spb/ovidweb.cgi?&amp;S=CMBGFNPBMMDDKLMKNNCGLF.htm">http://ovid.tx.ovid.com/spb/ovidweb.cgi?&amp;S=CMBGFNPBMMDDKLMKNNCGLF.htm</a>&gt;</p>	

## PRINCIPLE 4: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE DELIVERED IN ORGANISATIONS THAT VALUE LEARNING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, EVIDENCED PRACTICE AND RESEARCH.

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>Early graduate providers conduct an assessment at the beginning of the early graduate year of the individual graduate's learning needs and styles.</p> <p>Included in the EGP are specific learning strategies to meet the different needs of the graduates.</p> <p>The graduate program that encourages reflection and journaling assists professional growth</p> <p>Programs should provide education activities that are designed as rewards and not as remedial tools</p> <p>In the provision of the program, create positive strategies that recognise the graduates abilities and knowledge.</p> <p>Performance review is an important part of the graduate program.</p> <p>Early graduate programs should be 12 months in duration and there maybe opportunities for providers of EGP to organise recognition of the program through TAFE or University systems</p> <p>Health services often create articulating programs from first year graduate to second year graduate courses.</p>	<p>A positive learning environment has a number of characteristics including valuing educators and learners; consideration is also given to individual learning needs and styles.</p> <p>Graduates need regular constructive feedback on their progress and assistance to identify and attain personal learning and performance goals.</p> <p>Performance review is a very important part of the program and essential for the adaption of the graduate Research suggests that graduates need to develop an identity and feel part of the organisation.</p> <p>From a generational viewpoint, generation Y crave development and feedback in their work environment that stimulates learning and reflection for them.</p> <p>Research undertaken in 2004 disclosed that most graduates do not feel comfortable and confident until 12 months into their first employment.</p> <p>Development of an identity and feeling part of the organisation assist career commitment.</p> <p>Positive interpersonal and professional interactions correlate well with positive learning environments.</p>
<h3>REFERENCES (4)</h3>	
<p>Goh, K and Watt, E 2003, <i>From 'dependent on' to 'depended on': the experience of transitional from student to registered nurse in a private hospital graduate program</i>, Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, vol.21, no.1, pp. 14-20.</p> <p>Levett-Jones, T and Fitzgerald, M 2005, <i>A review of graduate nurse transition programs in Australia</i>, Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, vol.23, no.2, pp. 40-45.</p> <p>Australian Resource Centre for Healthcare Innovations (ARCHI), <i>Strengthening the new graduate nurse program using learning contracts</i>, viewed 9 January 2009, <a href="http://www.archi.net.au/e-library/workforce/nursing/strengthening_graduate.htm">http://www.archi.net.au/e-library/workforce/nursing/strengthening_graduate.htm</a>&gt;</p> <p>Robyn Johnston, Geof Hawke NCVET <i>Case studies of organisations with established learning cultures</i> 2002, Australian National Training Authority: South Australia.</p> <p>Beecroft, P.C., et al., <i>Bridging the Gap Between School and Workplace: Developing a New Graduate Nurse Curriculum</i>. Journal of Nursing Administration, 2004. <b>34</b>(7-8): p. 338-345.</p> <p>Casey K, F.R., Krugman M, Propst J. , <i>The new graduate nurse experience</i>. Journal Nursing Administration, 2004. <b>34</b>(6): p. 303-311.</p>	

**PRINCIPLE 5: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE PROVIDED IN A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT COMPLIES WITH PRINCIPLES OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT 2004.**

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>The provision of trained preceptors, orientation and supernumerary time on the ward/unit all assist the early graduate and provide a supportive environment.</p> <p>Support is best provided in the first four weeks and with each clinical rotation.</p> <p>Providers of best practice EGP need to consider coverage by experienced staff for supervision of early graduates especially out of hours.</p> <p>Provision of a best practice safe, learning environments lowers the likelihood of graduates making mistakes.</p> <p>If clinical skills and competencies are part of the graduate program, ensure that these are achievable.</p> <p>EGP providers that encourage nurse unit managers to foster a relationship with new graduates on their unit assist the graduates to feel part of the team.</p> <p>Best practice EGP monitors graduates for signs of isolation, alienation and stress,</p> <p>Group debriefing sessions provide effective psychosocial support</p> <p>Provide early graduates with education and protection from harassment, criticism, unfair rostering and excessive demands</p>	<p>Review of graduate programs throughout Australia suggests that supportive clinical environments in practice settings could be as effective as formal transition programs.</p> <p>Adequate support has been proven to ease anxiety for early graduate nurses and enhance job satisfaction. Other studies have proven that support is critical to transition and integration to the hospital. It is best provided in the first four weeks of the program and again with any ward rotation.</p> <p>All studies showed that preceptors play a key role in developing confidence and competence in nursing graduates. It has been suggested that the provision of preceptors can influence significantly the graduates job satisfaction and completion of the graduate program. There is evidence that adequate support leads to confidence and satisfaction with the RN role.</p> <p>Experienced staff and trained preceptors assist the early graduate to feel safe and increases graduates ability to consolidate their skills.</p> <p>Graduate nurses need to be able to ask questions and not discouraged from seeking direction when they need it. Provision of a good learning and safe environment assists with lowering the likelihood of graduates making mistakes.</p> <p>There is some evidence to suggest the nurse unit managers are viewed as leaders by new graduates and very influential in setting the tone of the work environment.</p> <p>Research outlined in the Sweeney Report 2006 described a supportive culture as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nurturing</li> <li>• allows time to learn</li> <li>• clear objectives</li> <li>• provides feedback on performance</li> <li>• peer and mentor support</li> </ul> <p>A qualitative study of group debriefing demonstrated that these sessions provided nurses with peer support and a sense of belonging. It also assisted with developing confidence in nursing competence.</p> <p>Australian Universities Teaching Committee Report found the key goals of a transition to work was to increase intrinsic motivation, socialisation into the role and resultant increased job satisfaction; It suggested these requirements were better addressed by creating a supportive work environment.</p>

## REFERENCES (5)

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## PRINCIPLE 6: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ADOPT A HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT CONSIDERS PROFESSIONAL , SOCIAL AND WHOLE OF LIFE ISSUES.

### EXAMPLE OF CONTENT

Early graduate programs should include education on cultural diversity specifically Indigenous culture including diversity in language, religious belief and ethnicity in the program. In particular, the policies and procedures that apply in the workplace concerning cultural safety should be included.

Programs should encourage peer support; groups can be internet- based or face to face facilitated groups. These groups provide an opportunity for debriefing and provide useful psychosocial support.

As mentioned in previous principles structured mentoring programs need processes to provide the individual with cognitive, spiritual and physical support.

Mentorship is encouraged as a mutually beneficial endeavour.

Programs with Aboriginal participants should consider support groups and mentors specifically for Indigenous graduates

Early graduates may want an opportunity to have non -clinical support.

Often the Graduate Year is the first job and many graduates that were surveyed suggested they wanted to be educated on lifestyle issues such as time management and money management.

### DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE

The Sweeney Report 2006 suggests that graduate programs could address broader lifestyle topics. Many of the graduates interviewed explained that the graduate program was their first work life experience and they needed information that is more general.

It was suggested in addition to clinical related topics such issues as managing money, stress and time could be included.

There is much literature to suggest that mentoring has a primary role in transitioning new graduates into new practice settings. A structured program has a greater chance of being effective with both mentor and mentee gaining from the relationship.

Group debriefing has been identified as an important part of the transitional process. It provides an opportunity to develop confidence and interpersonal communication.

Cross-Cultural Awareness Training has been seen as a way to improve nurses' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples in Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and to improve service delivery and

Programs could consider supplying negotiated rosters and part-time work

assist graduates to remain in the health service.

## REFERENCES (6)

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## PRINCIPLE 7: BEST PRACTICE EARLY GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE INTEGRALLY LINKED TO THE ORGANISATIONS QUALITY, SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS.

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT	DISCUSSION FROM LITERATURE
<p>The providers of early graduate programs should give graduates access to policies and procedures that refer to and include evidence and references</p> <p>Providers of early graduate programs should provide experienced staff and preceptors for graduates to access. It has been proven that out of hour's coverage and access to more experienced nurses for supervision is critical to graduate nurses.</p> <p>Programs should educate on clinical governance and risk management in orientation and then integrated throughout the year.</p> <p>Early graduates need to be encouraged to participate in quality initiatives and understand their role in improving patient care.</p> <p>Early graduate programs should include the recent research and major quality improvement issues within the providing health service.</p>	<p>Evidenced-based practice is a reflection on excellence and promotes skill development and job satisfaction.</p> <p>Policies and procedures should refer to and include evidence and references.</p> <p>Provision of a good learning and safe environment assists with lowering the likelihood of graduates making mistakes.</p> <p>Clinical risk management (CRM) is a systems approach to patient safety. In order for graduate nurses to become integrated into safe and relevant clinical governance, they need to acquire CRM information and practice in the context of their employment. This information should be delivered at the beginning of employment and thereafter developed and translated into routine practice.</p> <p>Research suggests that graduates not only need the information, but also need support from ward or unit staff to integrate CRM information.</p> <p>Research indicated many experienced nurses might not possess CRM information. Preceptor and supervisors may need CRM information and updates to enable them to assist early graduates.</p> <p>Early graduates need information on the quality process within the providing health service. Included in the information are the quality issues most commonly addressed such as falls prevention and medication safety. Research suggests that interruptions to the medication rounds are a high risk for all registered nurses.</p>
<h3>REFERENCES</h3>	
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