

Specialist mental health graduate nurse program

Program management circular

Key message

The preparation and transition of new graduates has a significant influence on the recruitment and retention of mental health nurses. In order to make the successful transition to employment and further develop professionally, new graduates require appropriate induction and orientation, access to more experienced nurses for supervision and instruction, peer support and mentoring, as appropriate, and introduction to specific clinical and workplace requirements.

The Department of Human Services provides area mental health service (AMHS) and specialist statewide mental health services with funding to assist with the employment of specialist nurse graduates as part of a recruitment and retention strategy designed to improve the attractiveness of a career in the public mental health service system and to provide new starters with a structured package of peer supports and professional development opportunities.

In the context of the current shortages in the mental health nursing workforce, the GNP should be viewed not just as a means of recruitment but as a mechanism for creating a commitment to a career in mental health nursing and therefore improving retention and longer term workforce capacity.

Purpose

The purpose of this program management circular is to provide clear guidelines to assist mental health services to meet the Department of Human Services guidelines for funding under the specialist mental health graduate nurse program (GNP) and to provide a practical framework for providers of the GNP to ensure consistency and quality in their development and delivery.

This program management circular has been developed for application across a range of clinical mental health settings where specialist mental health nurse graduates are employed. It should be read in conjunction with the *Graduate Nurse Program Guidelines* (2003), produced by the Nurse Policy Branch, Department of Human Services.

Definition

A specialist mental health graduate nurse is a nurse undertaking their first year of clinical work since the completion of their undergraduate training who are participating in a structured GNP. In respect to the specialist mental health graduate program, nurses who have completed a generalist graduate program, and are undertaking their first year in mental health are deemed not to be graduate nurses.

The role of the Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services provides funding to AMHS and specialist statewide mental health services to deliver mental health GNPs that will foster the development of new graduate nurses and enhance their experience of employment in the mental health field. There is no stipulation on the length of employment or a particular model of program delivery.

The Department allocates \$30,000 per specialist graduate nurse position. Payment is made to mental health services based on the number of effective full time (EFT) positions allocated by the Department to their GNP. Participating mental health services are required to report retrospectively to the Department on the actual number of specialist mental health graduate places filled. Discrepancies between expected and actual figures are noted by the Mental Health Branch and adjustments made to the organisations account in the subsequent funding period.

Where the cost of the graduate program is less than the allocated funding it is expected that services should increase their recruitment of graduates. In general, it is expected that \$30,000 would be sufficient to support two graduates.

Where mental health services have been unsuccessful in recruiting specialist mental health graduate nurses, the funding can be used to support graduate allied health positions. The funding is not available to support nurses who have completed a generalist graduate program without prior approval from the Department.

The specialist mental health graduate nurse program

The principal aim of the of the specialist mental health GNP is to support new graduates during the period of adjustment during which the graduate further develops the skills, knowledge, applied experience and values required to become an effective member of the mental health nurse workforce. The ultimate goal is for the graduate nurse to become competent, confident, accountable and professional and committed to working in the mental health field.

Use of funding

Funding allocated through the GNP may be used to fund the additional administrative and clinical support required to support the new graduate. It is expected that the organisation will provide the base salary allocated by the Department through its external mental health budget. The coordination of the program and educational support is to be provided by clinical nurse educators/clinical nurse consultants that are funded separately by the Department.

Eligible activities/areas of expenditure include:

- Backfill for orientation, study days and supernumerary days.
- Administration expenses directly related to the GNP.
- Backfill cost for clinicians participating in educational program(s).
- Marketing activities.
- Training and support of program coordinators, nurse educators, preceptors and mentors.
- Reasonable expenses related to clinical supervision or mentoring support during clinical rotations.

Recruitment of graduates

Area mental health services should have clear policies and procedures for the recruitment of graduates. Policies and procedures must be consistent with recruitment processes elsewhere in the organisation and outline the specific application and selection process for graduates. Consideration should be given to participating in computer matching processes.

About program management circulars

The information provided in this circular is intended as general information and not as legal advice. Mental health service management should ensure that policies and procedures are developed and implemented to enable staff to collect and use health information in accordance with relevant legislation.

If mental health staff have queries about individual cases or their obligations under the *Mental Health Act 1986* or the *Health Records Act 2001*, service providers should obtain independent legal advice.

Program structure and coordination

Program coordination

A dedicated coordinator of the graduate program must be appointed. The program coordinator is responsible for:

- The overall conduct of the GNP and the provision of day to day support to the graduate as required.
- Undertaking **needs assessment** of graduates to determine competencies and areas of interest and further development. This information provides a baseline and can be used for future evaluation of individual achievement against agreed goals and to measure improvement in skills and competencies.
- Developing a structured program based on the graduates and the organisations needs and coordinating its implementation including the coordination of corporate and clinical orientations and clinical rotations.
- Evaluation of the GNP including collection of relevant data throughout the placement.

This position provides the link between the graduate, support personnel, the organisation's administration and the collaborating services with the AMHS, ensuring that the program meets the expectations of the participating graduate while also taking into account the organisation's goals and strategic directions.

Further information

Further information about specialist mental health graduate programs can be obtained from Margaret Grigg, phone (03) 90967873 or email margaret.grigg@dhs.vic.gov.au.

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