An exploration of the development of public policy for the introduction of Nurse Practitioners in NSW: 1990–1998

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ABSTRACT

In December 2015, there were 1319 nurses authorised to use the title of Nurse Practitioner. The Nurse Practitioner (NP) role is now accepted within the nursing profession and the wider health care system in many countries around the world. It has been formally recognised as an advanced practice role within nursing and at law in all Australian states and territories. The role of NPs has been shaped by public policy in each specific jurisdiction.

This study explores the process of developing public policy required to introduce the NP role to Australia, specifically to the state of New South Wales. Known as the Nurse Practitioner Project (NPP), the development of the public policy that enabled the introduction of NPs took eight years. Using a critical social theory perspective, this study explores the drivers and challenges during the negotiations undertaken to establish the NP role during the period from 1990 to 1998.

Through analysis of interviews conducted with thirteen key informants, who represented key stakeholders during the NPP, the study reveals there were difficulties experienced in the development of the policy despite the bipartisan agreement at state government level. The study shows that the politics that most influenced the process and outcomes of the NPP were more related to the professions than party politics; in particular, it reveals rivalry and power plays between nursing and medicine. The findings of the study indicate that change processes underpinning health workforce reform are complex work. This is particularly the case when introducing a new role, due to the need to consider the impact on existing workforce arrangements and the historical context of the health professions involved.

CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

_____

Signature

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father William George ‘Bill’ Morton.

Dad, you had a heart as big as a butcher’s block.

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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS

In the presentation and analysis of the research findings where excerpts from participants' transcripts are included, the following abbreviations and font style have been used:

Quotes

Participant quotes are presented indicating the stakeholder group they represent e.g. N = nursing: D = doctor; P = politician etc. Quotes are indented and italicised. [ ] have been used to signify inclusions for explanation and clarification of text.

Additional Information

Additional information is included where a word or words were said more forcefully, more softly, included significant body language or where other factors impacted on the linguistic features of the text. The use of brackets and italics identifies such instances, such as follows:

> *... you are threatening us, don't you dare, you can leave, but he said just let me tell you this (N1 leans forward and taps on the table)...N1*

ACRONYMS

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)

Australian Medical Association (AMA)

Australian Nurses' Federation (ANF)

Chief Nursing Officer (CNO)

Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC)

Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)

Critical Social Theory (CST)

General Practitioner (GP)

Independent Nurse Practitioner Task Force (INPTF)

Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS)

Nurse Practitioner (NP)

Nurse Practitioner Project (NPP)

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA)

NSW Nurses' Registration Board (NRB)

NSW Nurses Association (NSWNA)

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Registered Nurse (RN)

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)

Rural Doctors Association (RDA)

World Health Organization (WHO)

GLOSSARY

Advanced nursing practice is:

> a continuum along which nurses develop their professional knowledge, clinical reasoning and judgement, skills and behaviours to higher levels of capability (that is recognisable).
>
> Nurses practising at an advanced level incorporate professional leadership, education and research into their clinically based practice. Their practice is effective and safe. They work within a generalist or specialist context and they are responsible and accountable in managing people who have complex healthcare requirements.
>
> Advanced nursing practice is a level of practice and not a role. It is acknowledged that advanced nursing practice is individually attributed within a regulated nursing scope (enrolled nurse, registered nurse or nurse practitioner). Advanced nursing practice for the purpose of the 5,000 hours required is not related to a job title or remuneration. (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2016, pp. 2-3)

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is the organisation responsible for the implementation of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme across Australia.

Clinical nurse consultants are specialist nurses who fulfil an organisation or area wide role principally involved in clinical consultancy, review, assessment and research (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2016).

Clinical nurse specialists are nurses who function as resources of expert nursing knowledge within their area of specialty (NSW Government, 2015).

District Health Service is a public health service funded by the state government, responsible for delivery of acute health services across a distinct geographic area.

General Practitioner is a medical practitioner who provides community-based primary health care funded by the Commonwealth government through the Medical Benefits Scheme.

Medicare is legislated universal health care for all Australian citizens funded by the Commonwealth government.

Nurse practitioner is an advanced practice nurse endorsed by the NMBA who has direct clinical contact and practices within their scope under the legislatively protected title 'nurse practitioner' (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2016).

Practice Nurses are registered nurses or enrolled nurses who are employed by, or whose services are otherwise retained by, a general practitioner in GPs private practice.

Regulation is a rule or directive made and maintained by an authority such as the NSW Nurses' Registration Board (Pearson, Fitzgerald, Walsh, & Borbasi, 2002, p. 358).

Scope of practice of an individual is that which the individual is educated, authorised and competent to perform. The scope of practice of an individual nurse or midwife may be more specifically defined than the scope of practice of their profession. To practise within the full scope of practice of the profession may require individuals to update or increase their knowledge, skills or competence (Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2007).