

PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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TITLE:

From accident to design: Preparing youth health nurses for school health practice in Australia

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Background

Recent Australian research identified that registered nurses enter school-based work by accident, not design. Internationally, registered nurses frequently require post-basic education to enter school nursing, but Australian universities do not offer any postgraduate preparation for this specialisation. This gap has implications for attracting youth health nurses into schools and supporting nurses who seek to develop expertise in school nursing. Adolescents spend significant time in schools, yet registered nurses with youth health expertise remain underutilised in these settings, and when they do transition to school-based roles, they face significant challenges related to the intersectoral nature of the role.

Approach

This presentation proposes a framework for postgraduate nursing education oriented to working in schools. Data sources include two forthcoming publications: a scoping review examining the scope of nursing work and models of service delivery in Australian schools, and qualitative research with nurses working in government and non-government schools in every state and territory of Australia.

Outcome

The presentation proposes foundational postgraduate school nursing education theoretically underpinned by the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s 8 Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools. Topics include introducing registered nurses to Australian school operations using the WHO framework as a lens; legislative and regulatory frameworks governing student health management; how professional nursing practice can be integrated into Australian school operations; and effective collaboration with education and community stakeholders. The proposal addresses critical knowledge gaps relating to school governance structures, duty of care obligations, medication management, mandatory reporting requirements, and interdisciplinary care planning across health and education systems.

Innovation and Significance

This work represents the first theoretically informed framework for postgraduate school nursing education in Australia. Establishing formal educational pathways would provide a clear pathway for youth health specialists into this under-recognised specialty, improve workforce preparedness, and enhance health service delivery to adolescents in schools.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

This study did not receive any funding. The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.