

# Pacific Heads of Nursing & Midwifery Meeting

## Réunion des chefs des soins infirmiers et obstétricaux du Pacifique

### **ACN Partnering Pacific Island nations to advance Critical Care Nursing Education**

Australian College of Nursing is an accredited higher education institute with a long history of providing on-line post-graduate education in over 20 nursing specialties. In 2020, ACN had the privilege of enrolling first cohort of registered nurses from the Pacific Island regions. Second cohort was enrolled in 2021. PI students were committed and resilient but the majority were not able to fully participate in on-line learning and assessment activities.

Access to adequate Information Technology and the impact of the pandemic were the most significant factors affecting study progression and course completion. ACN provided extensive support by adjusting timelines and increasing the amount of follow-up and feedback for each student. Despite these measures, the attrition rate was high at 41%.

To date, nineteen students (39%) have graduated and received a Graduate Certificate in Critical Care Nursing.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is an Institute of Higher Education with a long history of delivering postgraduate education for Australian and internationally qualified nurses. ACN offers an accredited and very well evaluated Critical Care Nursing curriculum, comprised of 600 hours of learning and assessments in four scaffolded units; three core and one specialty elective related to each student's specific area of clinical practice<sup>1</sup>.

Cardiac, Emergency and Intensive care nursing form the specialty streams in the academic award and are specified on the official ACN graduate certificate documents.

In April 2020, ACN enrolled two Registered Nurses from Fiji into the Graduate Certificate in Critical Care Nursing – Intensive care stream. Over the subsequent 2020 and 2021 academic terms, 47 more students from the Pacific region were enrolled into the course across the three specialty streams.

## 2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Course information and satisfactory outcomes

ACN Graduate Certificate in Critical Care Nursing encourages students to integrate their experiential and academic learning. The course provides opportunities for students to reflect on and critique their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Clinical excellence is promoted and informed by current literature, research and best practice guidelines. Professional and ethical practice underpins all learning content and assessment items.

- Nineteen Pacific Island students (39%) have completed the course and received the academic award in August 2021 and January 2022.
- Further, nine students (20%) have partially completed the course and received statement of attainment for completed units. They are eligible to re-apply and receive Advanced Standing for completed work - current for upto 5 years.
- Currently 4 students (commenced in April 2022) are enrolled in GC Critical care (3 beginners and 1 re-enrolling to complete 2 final units)

Students study and apply critical care principles underpinned current research and evidence based best practice guidelines. The course focuses on person centred care and addresses contemporary patient management strategies and professional nursing issues. This course is accredited by Tertiary Education

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acn.edu.au/education/postgraduate-course/critical-care-nursing>

Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and qualifies the graduates to undertake further studies in nursing; for example, graduate diploma or masters degrees<sup>2</sup>.

- **TEQSA** - Learning outcomes and content are informed by standards developed by specialty nurses.
- **Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN)**<sup>3</sup>
- **College of Emergency Nursing Australia (CENA)**<sup>4</sup>

All applicants must be currently employed in the area of the clinical specialty they wish to study. Students are supported by an experienced team of course coordinator, unit coordinators, tutors and library and administrative staff.

- Students engage with content through CNnect - ACN moodle platform. On-line course content, discussions and course assessment items are designed to support experiential learning and to facilitate integration of theory to clinical practice
- Tutor moderated web-based discussions allow the students to share their experiences, readings and insights into professional, ethical and legal aspects of critical care delivery. The course work is facilitated by ACN educators who stimulate and guide student interaction.
- Students receive formative and summative feedback, to ensure that their learning meets academic rigour, professional courtesy and respect for cultural diversity.
- Extensive library, study skills, academic and personal support
  - **ACN Library**<sup>5</sup>
  - **ACN Orientation**<sup>6</sup>
  - **Student support**<sup>7</sup>
  - **CNNection**<sup>8</sup>
  - **Writing and referencing centre**<sup>9</sup>
  - **Smarthinking academic support**<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register/search?search\\_api\\_views\\_fulltext=acn&field\\_provider\\_category=All&field\\_self accrediting authority=All&type=All&field\\_provider status=All&field course status=All&field course other language=All](https://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register/search?search_api_views_fulltext=acn&field_provider_category=All&field_self accrediting authority=All&type=All&field_provider status=All&field course status=All&field course other language=All)

<sup>3</sup> <https://accn.com.au/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cena.org.au/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cnnect.acn.edu.au/course/view.php?id=1279>

<sup>6</sup> <https://cnnect.acn.edu.au/mod/scorm/view.php?id=114850>

<sup>7</sup> <https://cnnect.acn.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2671>

<sup>8</sup> <https://cnnect.acn.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2627>

<sup>9</sup> <https://cnnect.acn.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2443>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pearson.com/us/higher-education/products-services-institutions/smarthinking/students.html>

### 3. CHALLENGES

#### 3.1 E-learning

E-learning can be difficult for many post graduate students who are likely to experience both cognitive and motivational challenges. Significant course content and assessment items require at least 15 hours of study per week

- Issues with internet access, hardware and software needs.
- Time poor with competing work, life priorities if families are not adequately supportive

#### 3.2 Covid-19 pandemic

- Extensive and overwhelming clinical work
- Own and family health issues<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.3 Current status of withdrawn students

- **Twenty one** students (43%) withdrew after census as they were not able to participate in required learning and assessment activities.
- Students who withdrew without completing any units usually cited family and personal reasons, eg pregnancy, family illness. Other issues were related to course workload or problems with internet access/IT competency.
- **Nine** students (18%) withdrew with partial completion
- Students who partially completed the course and then withdrew, generally cited work pressures and changes to practice during Covid-19 crisis.

All students required significant support with extensions for assessment items. Majority of students required more than one term to complete some units of study. All changes to progression were processed in accordance with ACN guidelines with strong emphasis on equity for students facing extenuating circumstances.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8184049/>

## 4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### 4.1 Recommendations for governments:

Advantages of e-learning

- Allows students to control access to and duration of learning hence fostering active and independent learning;
- Resources are available from anywhere and at any time if internet is working
- Students learn from peers from diverse clinical and geographic settings
- Unlimited access to course material so students can learn at own pace
- Promotes self-reliance as students need to be proactive with timely engagement and communication with peers and educators

### 4.2 Recommendations for development partners:

ACN is committed to ongoing facilitation and support for PI nurses who wish to undertake post graduate studies. We are proud and humbled by their perseverance and achievements during the last two and a half years. ACN wishes to thank PI nations for their initiative to provide post graduate critical care education for their Registered Nurses PI nations have an exciting opportunity to create alumni and other mentors for Registered Nurses wishing to undertake studies in Graduate Certificate in Critical Care Nursing.