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NURSES TOGETHER: A FORCE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

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The Progress of Work on the Nursing Specialization Framework in the Solomon Islands

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Health services across the Solomon Islands are delivered through approximately 353 facilities and are provided by a well-trained nursing workforce. The development of the new National Nursing Strategic Directions 2023 - 2027 supports the National Health Strategic Plan with policy focus areas that provide for the development of strategies such as the National Nursing Specialization Framework.

The urgent need to develop nurse specialists and nurse practitioners across the Pacific in order to meet the care needs of communities more effectively is well recognized. The development of a specialization framework will allow for the formalization and development of nurse specialist positions across Hospital Services, Primary Health Care Services and Public Health Programs, aligned to Solomon Islands Qualification Framework levels, and detailing qualification, clinical experience and position descriptions for speciality areas.

Though local level consultations have commenced, ongoing advocacy and support is needed to progress the development and implementation of the Framework as a priority for nursing and health services in the Solomon Islands.

1. BACKGROUND

Health services across the Solomon Islands are delivered through approximately 353 facilities. The backbone of health service delivery in the provinces and rural areas is provided by a well-trained nursing workforce. The country is now at a crossroads and faces important health challenges that could undermine development gains made to date. In particular, the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) has reached a crisis point and threatens to overwhelm the health system if aggressive steps are not taken to halt and reverse this trend. The National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP) 2022 – 2031 established strategic objectives that will guide health sector reform and performance over the next decade. Furthermore, the development of the new National Nursing Strategic Directions 2023 - 2027 supports the NHSP with policy focus areas that provide for the development of strategies such as the National Nursing Specialization Framework.

At the South Pacific Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers Alliance (SPCNMOA) meeting in 2018 with the Pacific Community (SPC), speakers discussed the urgent need to develop nurse specialists and nurse practitioners across the Pacific in order to meet the care needs of communities more effectively. A Nurse Specialist is defined as “...a nurse prepared beyond the level of a generalist nurse and authorized to practice as a specialist with advanced expertise in a branch of the nursing field...” 22(ICN 2009).

Countries agreed on the need for specialist nurses to be matched to country needs, with some Pacific countries having a greater need due to population and health indicators. It was recognized that to achieve the fundamental changes necessary for universal access to quality healthcare for communities and populations, there is an urgent need for specialist and advanced nursing roles. Primary Health Care was discussed as a core component of specialist nursing practice.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

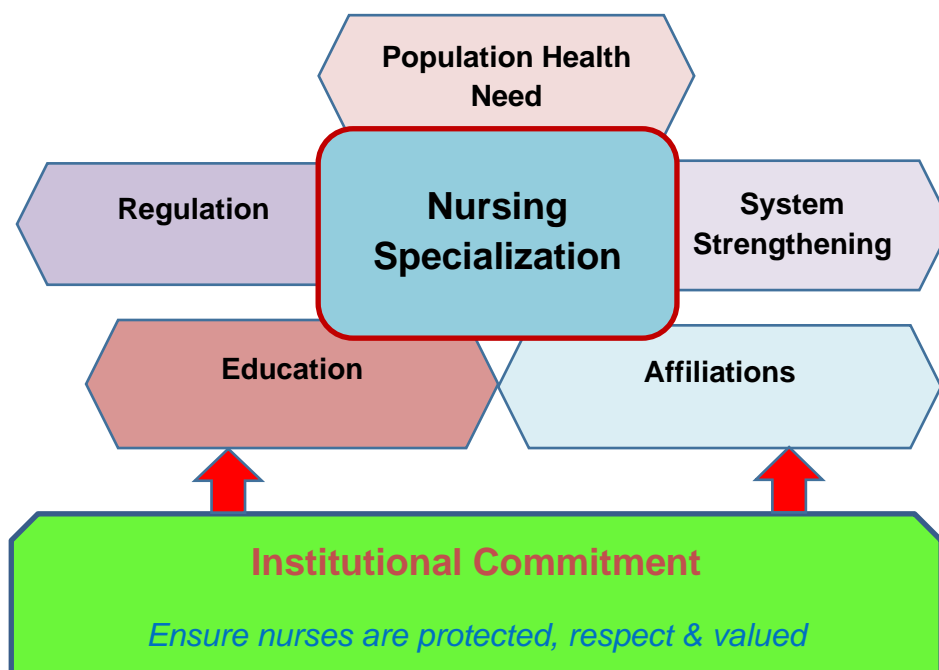
The need for nurses’ advanced and specialization practice in Solomon Islands health facilities is significant to meet the requirements of the Role Delineation Policy and improve service delivery. Clinical services need to shift to address the increasing service demand and technological changes in health. The nurses’ qualification status review report (2020) showed that more than 70% of nurses working in sub-specialty areas have either limited knowledge or no prior training, and only acquire

skills and knowledge through their period of clinical experience. This limitation is exacerbated by the lack of clear policy direction and clinical career pathway for advance and specialist training.

The development of the nurse's specialization framework will inform the Ministry of Health on the types of clinical career pathway and recognition for nurse specialists in Solomon Islands.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

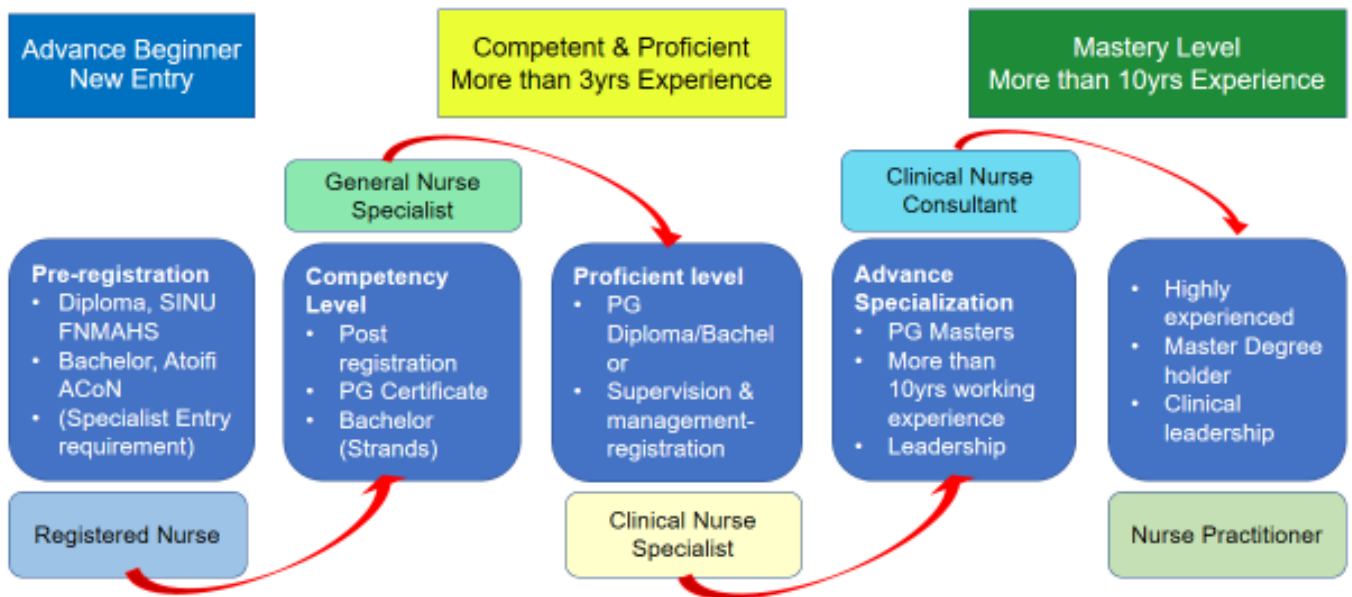
The development of the conceptual framework forms the basis of how the nurses' specialization framework is developed to impact and influence important variables as shown below.



2.2 Qualification and Practice Pathway for Clinical Nurses.

The qualification and practice pathway for clinical nurses sets practice and qualification levels to inform the training and recruitment needs for specialist nurses. The nurse specialist positions are identified under the categories of: Hospital Services; Primary Health Care Services; and Public Health Programs.

The specialist positions are intended to be aligned with the Solomon Islands Qualification Framework levels which will determine the required qualification and clinical experience.



2.3 Levels, Standards and Competencies of Nurse Specialties

The three (3) levels for nurse specialists that will provide a career pathway for professional development and progression.

1. A *Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)* is an RN who has worked for at least 3 years post registration. One year must be spent as a general nurse and 2 years in their area of specialization, AND holds a minimum of a graduate certificate, AND has worked for a minimum of two years following completion of their specialty program.
2. A *Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC)* is an RN with extensive specialized clinical experience who has worked as a clinical nurse specialist for at least 3 years, and who has completed a master's degree in the area of specialty, AND has worked in the area of specialization for a minimum of one year following completion of studies. The master's degree can be completed concurrently (with 3 years of experience at CNS level).
3. A *Nurse Practitioner (NP)* is a highly experienced and educated RN who is a member of the core team, and is able to diagnose and treat healthcare needs or refer clients/patients to an appropriate specialist if needed. A NP must have 8-10 years post registration experience with a minimum PG qualification in an area of specialization, AND has 3 years of experience at CNS level and completion of NP Masters.

2.4 Nurses Specialization Standards and Competencies

Specialist levels are described by their scopes of practice and standards of practice domains.

Levels	Description	Scope of Practice	Standards of Practice				
			1. Clinical Care	2. Optimising Health Systems	3. Education	4. Research	5. Leadership
Clinical Nurse Specialist	RN minimum of 3 years practice. Grad Cert in specialty area	High level of clinical experience & skills. Provides complex nursing care in specialized areas.	Care for individual patients/ clients	Contributing to effective functioning of health systems & institutional nursing services	Providing practical/ professional environment that encourages education of patients, nurses & self	Incorporating evidence to provide quality health care	Sharing and dissemination of knowledge beyond individuals institutional setting
Clinical Nurse Consultant	RN extensive clinical experience in specialty area	Expands upon the role of both the RN and CNS. Exercises extended autonomy in decision making					
Nurse Practitioner	RN highly experienced and educated. Diagnose & treat	advance nursing practice,					

2.5 Stakeholder consultation and framework development

As part of the overall review of the new National Nursing Strategic Directions, stakeholder consultations include internal stakeholders which covers nurses from various backgrounds, and external stakeholders which includes line ministries, faith-based organizations and non-government organizations.

Under nursing education, findings on nurses' qualification showed continuous support for in-service training for nurses under the Ministerial Training Committee. 23% of Solomon Islands nurses have completed post registration (in-service) trainings over the last two decades. 90% of nurses' highest qualification are post-registration bachelor degree level. 7% graduated with postgraduate diploma and 3% with Master's Degrees. 85% of nurses post-registration qualifications are obtained from Solomon Islands National University, mostly through Solomon Islands Government Scholarship awards. 10% obtained their postgraduate qualifications from regional institutions such universities in Australia.

Local institutions do not offer postgraduate clinical specialist training programs. Thus we are unable to match the high demand of specialist trained nurses for new specialist clinical services. The National Nursing Division recognized the need to address the nurses' clinical career pathway to set the

foundation for the nurse's qualification framework. Specialization training for nurses must be guided by a clear career pathway and policy directions. Hence the development of the Solomon Islands Nurses Specialization Framework.

The work carried out in this framework include reviewing current nurse specialization and advanced practice nursing (APN) in countries across the Pacific region. The need to reform the nursing profession to be more responsive in discharging their duties as specialist nurses at the different levels of health facilities was also considered.

It is anticipated that the development of the framework will bear the following results:

- Informed nursing workforce training and development plan.
- Clear nurse specialist roles through the nursing career pathway.
- Recognition of nurses' clinical skills at level.
- Optimizes reform opportunities (service delivery and workforce).
- Ensures workforce development including transferability of skills, mobility and more coherent career and educational pathways.

What we have now is a zero draft that will undergo more consultation for it to be completed and later implemented.

3. CHALLENGES

3.1 Completion of the framework

While the progress of the development is appreciated, the need to complete the framework is significant. Consultation at the local level started but is yet to complete. There are plans to reach out to other cadres including the training institutions which is yet to be achieved. Departments are also developing their corporate plans which include similar work so there is need to consult further.

3.2. Completion of the National Nursing Strategic Directions and the Nursing Council Act

The development of the National Nursing Strategic Directions (NNSD) 2023 to 2027 and the review of the Nursing Council Act is still ongoing and work on them needs to be completed as the framework

relies on nursing education and qualification which is a strategic area in the NNSD and regulation which is the emphasis of the Nursing Act.

With the presentation of this paper at the PHONM forum, it is hoped that consultations will begin with countries at the regional level, development partners, training institutions and other stakeholders to complete the Solomon Islands National Nurses Specialization Framework.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- 4.1 Solomon Islands government through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to support this with resources as the framework will contribute to improving health service delivery to the people and supports the implementation of the Role Delineation Policy
- 4.2 Development partners to provide technical support to complete the framework and development of the implementation plan and continue general support to advance and eventually implement the framework.
- 4.3 Next steps in the development and implementation of the Nursing Specialization Framework include:
 - Parallel training for medical doctors and nurses on specific specialist clinical areas.
 - Complete and implement the framework in alignment to the strategic area of the National Nursing Strategic Directions 2023 to 2027.
 - Inclusion of the framework in the current Nursing Council Act review.
 - Submission of the framework to Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority (SITESA) Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) for accreditation and registration.
 - Socialize the framework and get buy-in from nursing education providers and development partners.