

**ROLE OF THE GERONTOLOGICAL NURSE
PRACTITIONER IN AUSTRALIA**

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Submitted to the

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

School of Population Health and Clinical Practice

in the Discipline of Nursing

of the

UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

in fulfillment of the award of

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	10
SIGNED STATEMENT OF CERTIFICATION	12
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	14
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	16
1 INTRODUCTION.....	18
1.1 WHAT IS A NURSE PRACTITIONER?.....	18
DEFINITION OF THE ROLE OF A NURSE PRACTITIONER.....	18
1.2 HEALTHCARE PROVISION IN AUSTRALIA'S AGED CARE SECTOR. 20	
REGISTERED NURSES IN CHARGE	20
THIS PROJECT WAS THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN AGED CARE NURSE PRACTITIONER PROJECT TO STUDY THE ACNP ROLE IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE	21
GP PANELS – ADDRESSING A NEED FOR MEDICAL SERVICES	22
PRE-EMPTIVE NURSING INTERVENTIONS.....	24
RN WORKFORCE SHORTAGE	25
SPECIALISED BODY OF KNOWLEDGE – CONSUMER AND GOVERNMENT EXPECTATIONS.....	25
1.3 RESEARCHING THE VALIDITY OF NURSE PRACTITIONERS IN AUSTRALIA'S AGED CARE SETTING.....	27
IMPROVING A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE – LEGITIMISING PERFORMED PRACTICES	27
1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT	30
IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN OUTCOMES OF CARE WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF AN ACNP?	30

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

2	BACKGROUND.....	34
2.1	THE NORTH AMERICAN EXPERIENCE	34
	NURSE PRACTITIONERS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	34
	THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN THE US	34
	NP SCOPES OF PRACTICE IN THE US	35
	US PRESCRIPTIVE AUTHORITY	35
2.2	NURSE PRACTITIONERS IN AUSTRALIA	36
	NURSES ACTS	36
	CONTINUING EDUCATION.....	36
	NATIONAL BOARDS	37
	CATEGORIES OF NP PRACTICE.....	38
	NURSE PRACTITIONER REGISTRATION IN EACH AUSTRALIAN STATE.....	39
	VICTORIAN LEGISLATION AND REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS ..	43
	THREE PATHWAYS FOR NP REGISTRATION IN VICTORIA	43
	PRESCRIBING MEDICATIONS IN VICTORIA.....	45
	THE NP SCOPE OF PRACTICE IN VICTORIA	47
	AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY.....	48
	NEW SOUTH WALES.....	49
	WESTERN AUSTRALIAN.....	50
	QUEENSLAND.....	51
	SOUTH AUSTRALIA	51
	TASMANIA AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.....	52
	NATIONAL REGISTRATION ISSUES.....	52
	MEDICARE BENEFITS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	53

2.3	THE AUSTRALIAN AGED CARE INDUSTRY'S REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	56
	THE AGED CARE ACT 1997	56
	APPROVED PROVIDER REQUIREMENTS	56
	AGED CARE ACCREDITATION	57
	ACCREDITATION GRANT PRINCIPLES AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	59
	THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL AND GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES	61
	CARE DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS	63
	REGULATION AND STAFF RETENTION AT RISK	63
	THE RESIDENT CLASSIFICATION SCORE AND THE ACFI	65
	HEALTH PRACTITIONERS AND ASSESSMENTS	66
2.4	A PROFILE OF THE AUSTRALIAN AGED CARE INDUSTRY	67
	PROVISION OF COMMUNITY AND RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE PLACES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA	67
	AGEING IN PLACE	69
2.5	THE SHORTAGE OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS IN AGED CARE	71
	WORLDWIDE SHORTAGE OF NURSING STAFF	71
	THE AUSTRALIAN AGED CARE WORKFORCE	72
	AN AGED CARE LABOUR MARKET IN CRISIS	73
	DIFFICULTIES IN ATTRACTING NURSES	75
	WORKFORCE SHORTAGE RELATED LEGAL ISSUES	76
	RETENTION ISSUES	76
3	LITERATURE REVIEW	78
3.1	PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW	78

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

3.2	REVIEW METHOD.....	78
3.3	CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALISTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES	80
	THE NP ROLE IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA.....	80
	CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALISTS VS NURSE PRACTITIONERS	81
	NP INTERVENTIONS LESS COSTLY.....	81
	NPS PERFORM BETTER THAN MDS.....	82
	NPS DECISIONS BASED UPON A FULL HISTORY.....	83
	THE POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TAKING A FULL HISTORY MAKES	85
	LACK OF GERONTOLOGY BASED DECISIONS – MDS COMPARED WITH NPS	86
	THE VALUE OF A CLINICAL HISTORY	87
	ACNPS IN NORTH AMERICA	87
	STAFF EDUCATION REQUIRED TO AID NP UNDERSTANDING	88
	SUCCESS DEPENDENT ON SENIOR PERSONNEL AND ORGANISATIONAL GOALS.....	90
	THE IMPORTANCE OF ACNP COMMUNICATION.....	92
	ACCESS TO MORE TIMELY CARE.....	94
	POSITIVE OUTCOMES RELATED TO ACNP INVOLVEMENT	95
	PHYSICIAN SURVEY IDENTIFIES POSITIVE VIEW OF ACNP INVOLVEMENT	95
	NURSE PRACTITIONERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM / EUROPE	97
	NURSE PRACTITIONERS IN NEW ZEALAND	103
3.4	RESPECTING STAFF EQUALS QUALITY CARE FOR RESIDENTS	103
	NURSING LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY CARE	103

3.5 GERONTOLOGICAL NURSE PRACTITIONERS AND QUALITY OUTCOMES	108
AGED CARE NURSES MUST BE EXPERTS	108
MEDICATION MANAGEMENT AND ACNPS	110
PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS AND ACNPS	111
A NURSING MODEL VS A MEDICAL MODEL	113
3.6 FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE SUCCESS OF AN ACNP ROLE	115
HISTORY OF PHYSICIAN OPPOSITION TO THE NP ROLE IN AUSTRALIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES	115
PRESCRIBING AND ORDERING DIAGNOSTIC TESTS	118
THE ROLE OF AN ACNP AND EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE	119
3.7 AN AUSTRALIAN ACNP STUDY – SUBSEQUENT TO THIS PROJECT	
123	
THE NATIONAL AGED CARE NURSE PRACTITIONER TRIAL	123
THE INPRAC PROJECT RESULTS	124
THE NATIONAL TRIAL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES	125
THE RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL TRIAL	126
THE NATIONAL TRIAL COLLABORATOR SURVEY RESULTS	126
THE NATIONAL TRIAL RESIDENT HEALTH AND SATISFACTION RESULTS	127
THE NATIONAL TRIAL’S ACNP WORK-TIME BREAKDOWN	130
OTHER NATIONAL TRIAL FINDINGS	131
THE NATIONAL TRIAL ACNP CORE INTERVENTIONS	131
THE NATIONAL TRIAL’S IDENTIFIED LIMITATIONS AND ROLE BARRIERS	132
IN SUMMARY	132

4	METHODS USED TO EVALUATE THE ROLE OF AN AGED CARE NURSE PRACTITIONER IN VICTORIA AUSTRALIA – THE RESEARCH PROJECT	136
4.1	AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESEARCH PROJECT	136
4.2	THE SITE - AN OVERVIEW	136
4.2	SELECTING PROJECT PARTICIPANTS	137
	SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION	137
	RECRUITMENT TO THE STUDY	137
	DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS	138
4.3	WORKING WITH THE OTHER AGED CARE TRIAL PROJECTS	138
	AGED CARE NURSE PRACTITIONER PROJECTS IN VICTORIA	138
	ONGOING CONSULTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROLE	139
	DATA COLLECTION ACROSS PROJECTS.....	139
	COMMON LIST OF MEDICATIONS ACROSS PROJECTS.....	140
4.4	SELECTING THE RIGHT METHODOLOGY	141
	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY RATIONALE	141
4.5	PREPARATION	143
	ETHICS APPROVAL	143
	DETERMINING THE NECESSARY PHASES OF THE PROJECT	143
	DETERMINING THE MODEL OF CARE	144
	NP RESPONSIBILITIES.....	145
	WORKING WITHOUT NP AUTHORITY	146
	COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND FOCUS GROUPS	149
4.6	EVALUATION METHODS	151

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

EVALUATION COMPONENTS.....	151
COMPONENT 1 SCOPE OF PRACTICE PRE- AND POST- IMPLEMENTATION.....	152
COMPONENT 2 QUALITY OF SERVICE EVALUATION PRE- AND POST-IMPLEMENTATION.....	154
COMPONENT 3 CONSUMER EVALUATION PRE- AND POST- IMPLEMENTATION.....	155
COMPONENT 4 KEY STAKEHOLDER EVALUATION POST- IMPLEMENTATION.....	156
COMPONENT 5 EVALUATIVE STUDY OF HEALTH OUTCOMES PRE- AND POST-IMPLEMENTATION.....	157
COMPONENT 6 ECONOMIC EVALUATION POST-IMPLEMENTATION 159	
4.7 FURTHER TOOLS AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	159
5 RESULTS	162
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	162
MODEL OF CARE	162
5.2 COMPONENT 1 – SCOPE OF PRACTICE	163
5.3 COMPONENT 2 – QUALITY OF SERVICE	169
5.4 COMPONENT 3 - CONSUMER EVALUATION	171
5.5 COMPONENT 4 - KEY STAKEHOLDER EVALUATION POST- IMPLEMENTATION	180
5.6 COMPONENT 5 - EVALUATIVE STUDY OF HEALTH OUTCOMES – PRE- AND POST-IMPLEMENTATION	191
BARTHEL’S INDEX	191

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

	SOCIAL FUNCTION I	195
	SOCIAL FUNCTION II	195
	5.7 COMPONENT 6 – ECONOMIC EVALUATION POST IMPLEMENTATION	
	200
	HOSPITALISATIONS	205
	STAFF VIEWS ON ECONOMIC IMPACT	208
	5.8 CASE STUDIES – INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES	210
	CASE STUDY 1.....	210
	CASE STUDY 2.....	211
	CASE STUDY 3.....	212
	CASE STUDY 4.....	212
6	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	216
7	CONCLUSION.....	226
7.1	THE ACNP ROLE	226
7.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE	227
8	REFERENCES.....	232
9	APPENDICES.....	250
10	LIST OF TABLES	251
11	LIST OF FIGURES.....	252
12	LIST OF INFORMATION BOXES	252

ABSTRACT

The role of an aged care nurse practitioner (ACNP) is well recognised internationally however, in Australia, the implementation of this advanced role is still in its infancy with few gerontological nursing experts registered as nurse practitioners (NP). This single Victorian facility 2002 study was the first to consider the role of an ACNP in Australia and the first to describe the clinical and social benefits or otherwise of ACNP interventions in an Australian context. NP Studies in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) from 1999 – 2002 investigated the role in other nursing domains followed by an ACNP study conducted over 2004-2005. A subsequent national ACNP study in 2005 provided complementary results to this first Australian ACNP study which created the framework for these subsequent projects.

This study aimed to establish: clinical or other outcomes that a gerontological nurse practitioner (ACNPs) could achieve for older persons in an Australian residential aged care facility, factors that impacted upon the introduction of such a role, a definition of the role and to establish whether such a role would benefit older persons in Australia.

Various methods were used to determine the numerous outcomes which were to be studied in this project. A quantitative analysis of the functional and social status of residents who participated in the project, pre and post the ANCP interventions was undertaken. A quantitative analysis of the satisfaction of residents or their representatives pre and post the interventions is also presented. A qualitative analysis via focus groups, of the views of staff, residents and health professionals involved in the project was undertaken. Hospital rates pre and post the interventions and case studies are presented as additional information only.

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

The team involved in this Victorian Government Department of Human Services funded aged care nurse practitioner project at Greensborough Private Nursing Home included this researcher, the ACNP candidate, the Director of Nursing (DON) and Deputy DON. The team jointly managed the complex legal framework, to ensure interventions were implemented safely for all residents with the support of the residents' general practitioners and other health professionals working for the nursing home.

Statistically significant improvements in the resident's functional and social status were demonstrated for residents treated by the ACNP. Additionally, the resident and representative satisfaction survey revealed a higher overall level of satisfaction with the home following the project's completion. The results demonstrated that the ACNPs' interventions were of high quality, led to improvements in resident health outcomes, improved residents' quality of life and reduced hospitalisation rates. This was achieved by intervening in a timely manner when residents required relief of their physical and psychological symptoms through targeted interventions and one-on-one specialist medical nursing attention.

In summary, this study identified interventions an ACNP could undertake and therefore the role they could play in an Australian residential aged care facility, given the national legislation governing all aspects of an aged care facility. This study demonstrated that the role was feasible and achieved positive resident outcomes despite the factors that impeded its introduction.

Signed statement of certification

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Caroline Lee and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

Acknowledgements

This researcher wishes to acknowledge a number of people who assisted during this project in various ways. The first acknowledgement is to the project's Nurse Practitioner candidate Richard Walpole for his significant efforts and contribution to the Case Studies in this thesis, Director of Nursing John Hardstaff, and Deputy Director of Nursing Nancy Mills, of Greensborough Private Nursing Home for their support and active role. This team had to manage a difficult registered nurse legal framework to ensure interventions were successfully implemented for the benefit of all residents and staff at the aged care facility. The second acknowledgment goes to the Department of Human Services and proprietors of Greensborough Private Nursing Home Joe and Mary Joseph, who supported the management team to undertake such a project in residential aged care, a previously unrecognised forum for nurse practitioners in Australia. Many thanks go to the residents, resident representatives, staff, general practitioners Dr Rick Hooper, Dr David Lunn, Dr Paul Clarke and Dr VJ Karna and other health professionals at Greensborough Private Nursing Home, who kindly participated in the development and implementation of the model of care and contributed to the findings and ongoing project mechanisms.

Final thanks go to my supervisors Professor Alan Pearson for his input and direction and Dr Tim Schultz for his ongoing guidance and patience during editing, to Frank Unferdorben for his project MS Access data entering support, to my children Cassie, William and Daniel and friend Graham Lee, for their years of never ending support, my husband Paul Kean for his loving encouragement, and my parents Frank and Piri Unferdorben for their perpetual faith in me. Without my family's ongoing encouragement, this thesis would never have been completed.

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

Role Of The Gerontological Nurse Practitioner In Australia

Glossary of Terms

ACFI	Aged care funding instrument
Aged Care	In the context used in this thesis, the residential aged care environment
Aged Care Nurse Practitioner (ACNP) - role and parameters of practice	This term is used to describe both ACNPs identified in various studies and aged care nurse practitioner candidates involved in this study and others as described. ACNP practice refers to therapeutic medication management, diagnostic investigation management, referrals to medical specialists, and all nursing care of the aged care residents of this home. All ACNP practices are undertaken in partnership with the multidisciplinary team. Clinical practice guidelines written in 2004 based on the ACNP Project funded from 2002-2003 by the Victorian Department of Human Services, provide the framework of practice for the ACNP role. The equivalent term used to refer to an Aged Care Nurse Practitioner is Gerontological or Geriatric Nurse Practitioner.
Approved provider	A body that is approved under the Aged Care Act 1997 by the Commonwealth to provide services to older persons in a residential aged care facility that receives Commonwealth funding
BSL	Blood sugar level
CCF	Congestive Cardiac Failure
Client	The recipient of an aged care service
CPG	Clinical Practice Guideline
DON, ADON, DDON	Director of Nursing, Assistant Director of Nursing, Deputy Director of Nursing
Geriatrics	Sick elderly
Gerontology	The study of dependent elderly
GLNP or GNP	Gerontological or Geriatric Nurse Practitioner – the equivalent term used to refer to an Aged Care Nurse Practitioner
GP	General Medical Practitioner
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
IM	Intra muscular (injection)
MD	Medical practitioner (may include GPs)
MP	Medical Practitioner
NIDDM	Non-insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus
NP	Nurse Practitioner
PCs	Personal Carers, personal workers, nursing assistants, assistants in nursing – non-registered care staff employed by aged care facilities to provide services to residents of a basic nursing nature
PEG	Percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy
Per	For each one; apiece
Post	After...
Pre	Prior to ...
RACF	A residential aged care facility which is federally funded to provide quality care services to older persons who have been assessed by a recognised Aged Care Assessment service as requiring residential care.
RCS	Resident classification scale
RDNS	Royal District Nursing Service
Re	Regarding ...
RN	Registered Nurses as registered under various bodies in Australian States and other countries, including the Victorian Nurses Board in Victoria, Australia
RN Div 2	Registered Nurse Division 2 (in Victoria) – the equivalent of an Enrolled Nurse in other States or Territories
UTI	Urinary Tract Infection