



## **Submission to the Inquiry into Health & Medical Research**

The School of Nursing & Midwifery at Monash University is within the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, and it is one of the most innovative schools for nursing and midwifery education in both Australia and the Asia-Pacific Region. The School offers on-campus, distance education and mixed mode studies. The School has a proven reputation in the quality of its teaching and research and has played a leadership role in shaping and providing for the educational requirements of the nursing and midwifery professions and health industry, enabling students to develop the latest skills incorporating health information technologies as well as gaining knowledge of foundation studies, essential to nursing practice. Nursing courses are offered at Berwick, Clayton, Gippsland and Peninsula campuses with further students studying in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore, in partnership with education providers in the Asia-Pacific Region. Midwifery programs are offered at our Clayton, Gippsland and Peninsula campuses. There is a significant presence of on-shore international students on all campuses.

The research profile of the School has developed rapidly over the last 10 years or so, with the establishment of the International Practice Development Collaborative, the Palliative Care Research Team and coalescence of research in areas of mental health, midwifery, education and acute care. All research is linked to clinical environments, often involving clinical partners on research teams, and thus translational outcomes are readily evident. Sources of research funding are broad, encompassing philanthropic, government, ARC and NHMRC. The School has established strategic international links and has an excellent track record in research completions and publications. The ERA ratings and analysis data for 2010 for Nursing (FoR code 1110) show that, compared with other Go8 Universities, Monash University School of Nursing and Midwifery staff are maintaining steady research outputs. Benchmarked at 3, the School is equal to world standards. The ERA data (2010) showed impressive numbers of books (5), book chapters (9), refereed articles (155) and conference proceedings (7), plus a total research income of \$1,391, 539. Even so, we realise that more can be done to increase our research outputs.

The issues we, the members of the School Research Committee (SRC) of the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Monash University, wish to present for consideration in this Inquiry are the relative lack of access to, and success in, major national research funding programs for nurses and midwives, and the need to build the capacity of the nursing and midwifery research workforce.

- **The relative lack of access to, and success in, major national research funding programs for nurses and midwives.**
- Nursing's foci on researching human experiences and constantly improving nursing and healthcare are major contributions to Australia's healthcare system. Nurse researchers use a variety of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research designs to achieve research aims and objectives relating to human experiences in all the ages and stages of life transitions in health and illness. Knowledge management and health intelligence is underpinned by nursing and midwifery clinical leadership

and research opportunity. These goals are in line with the NHMRC goals of recent years, to strengthen the translational outcomes of research.

- Despite establishing strong interdisciplinary research teams, receiving University assistance with grant-writing and participating on grant panels, levels of grant success in national schemes within the School remain low. For example, the School submitted 58 grant applications in 2011 with budgets totaling \$11,233,650.77. Of these, 14 grants were successful totaling \$709,915.00, which represents less than 7% success. This may be to a number of reasons, including the tendency of granting bodies to favour and fund bio-medically-oriented, cure-related projects, a lack of understanding of qualitative and or mixed methodologies, a lack of understanding of models/designs of nursing research, and/or because the disciplines of nursing and midwifery may be still considered to be finding their place in academic environments.
- Because nursing research often relies on funding which sits outside national schemes like ARC and NHMRC (hospital or philanthropic funding), the extent of research undertaken may not be as visible to those measuring research success. We seek the Committee's consideration of ways to redress the inequitable lack of access to, and success in, major national research funding programs for nurses, so that our often hidden contribution can take its place among other dominant forms of research.
- **Attention needs to be given to building the nursing and midwifery research workforce.**
- Nurses entering research/academic roles do not take the traditional route of many other disciplines. They usually complete undergraduate studies, work in a clinical environment for a period, resume their studies perhaps part-time and often end up in research/academic posts in their late 30s or 40s. Consideration of scholarship schemes to support PhD studies, are impractical, because the low levels of funding are not commensurate with the life commitments of an older person.
- Also, there are significant disadvantages for an individual nurse or midwife transferring from a clinical environment into an academic role, including moving away from the practice core of nursing or midwifery, moving into the competitive environment of academia, and practical considerations, such as less pay relative to years of experience. Even so, high impact, actively-engaged nurses and midwives are required in academia to forward the professions research and scholarship. Innovative nursing and midwifery research roles require appropriate funding and infrastructure to attract and keep younger nurses and midwives in academia, in research-teaching and research only roles.

Nursing research occurs in both clinical and academic environments. Capacity-building is a significant issue, because nurses are an ageing workforce in both settings. Experienced nurses and midwives in both settings need to prepare early and mid-career nurses and midwives in the pursuit of clinical practices, education and research. Therefore, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Monash, and in similar Schools throughout Australia, research funding needs to be specifically directed to nursing and midwifery research, so research mentors can build research and scholarship capacity within the professions. Joint appointments and clinical and research collaborations must be facilitated, especially for those at a distance from each other, in rural, remote and professionally isolated settings for the timely translation of evidence to policy and practice.

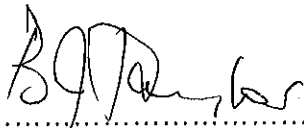
In summary, we present to the Inquiry Panel, the issues of the relative lack of access to, and success in, major national research funding programs for nurses and midwives, and the need to building the capacity of the nursing and midwifery research workforce. In both cases, the issues can be addressed by examining the unique needs of the nursing research workforce, and developing more equitable funding systems specifically directed towards nursing research, so the researchers within the profession can increase their contributions towards continued improvement of the Australian healthcare system.

Submitted on behalf of the Members of the SRC, School of Nursing and Midwifery,  
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