

Here to stay: guidance for the safe and effective integration of internationally qualified nurses into the Aotearoa New Zealand workforce¹

A recent review of the international literature¹ highlighted the growing global need to fill nursing skill shortages by recruiting overseas. It comprehensively concluded that *“the advantages in professional skill that IQN can bring...will not be realised without substantial efforts to reduce practice limitations (deskilling) and discrimination....and strategies to ease transition should be implemented (p.542)”*.

This guideline provides employers with information and strategies for supporting internationally qualified nurses (IQNs) to transition successfully to the Aotearoa New Zealand workforce.

The proportion of IQNs in the nursing workforce over the last five years has expanded steadily and significantly to the point where more than half of all new registrations with the Nursing Council in the last five years trained outside Aotearoa New Zealand, and more than a quarter of the total regulated nursing workforce are IQNs. Additionally, there have been changes to the proportions coming from particular countries; with the numbers coming from the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland falling, and those from Asia, India and Africa rising, though global and national events mean this picture can rapidly change.

Many IQNs are extremely experienced and highly qualified nurses, and bring huge benefit to this country's health care capacity. Yet recent NZNO surveys have revealed significant tensions related to the rapid increase of IQNs in the workforce. Some Aotearoa New Zealand qualified regulated nurses (NZQNs) distrust some IQNs' training, especially their perceived lack of cultural awareness of the Aotearoa New Zealand context and/or English language skills. Additionally, there was widespread observation of racism towards Asian and Indian nurses in particular from patients, and feelings of discrimination, frustration and disappointment from IQNs at constrained roles, scopes of practice or career opportunities in this country.²

A nursing shortage is predicted, driven by increasing nurse emigration (particularly to Australia) and increases in the age of both patients and nurses. If the national, institutional, and personal costs of IQN recruitment are not to be wasted due to onward nurse migration, we must make sure IQNs are supported to use their skills and experience to the full, that NZQNs are enabled to better support IQN integration, and to better understand and value the professional and cultural differences IQNs bring to the nursing workforce. Similar tensions and conflicts caused by large and rapid changes in

¹ Acknowledgement: This document draws heavily on the Royal College of Nurses 'Success with Internationally recruited nurses' Guidelines, 2005

nursing workforces in other countries led to the introduction of specific programmes to help the integration of the new workforce; these are needed in Aotearoa New Zealand too.

Preparation of existing staff

Aotearoa New Zealand, with its history of immigration and blending of cultures, is generally a tolerant and accepting country. Nurses, many of whom have themselves worked overseas, are personally and professionally open-minded. Key to the successful integration of IQNs will be the fostering of an understanding of the mutual benefits of overseas nursing recruitment, and of the issues IQNs face in acclimatising to the workforce and to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Existing staff (and in particular management) training should cover:

- > the need for IQN recruitment, and the benefits to nurse workload, professional development and patient care the nurses can bring;
- > cultural awareness training, with particular emphasis on knowledge of the nursing environment in the countries in which the IQNs have trained/worked, in order to increase understanding and support of IQNs;
- > the induction and orientation needs of IQNs to allow them to work to their full potential;
- > understanding of the overseas education and Nursing Council regulatory processes by which Aotearoa New Zealand nurses can be assured that IQNs, once they have adapted, are culturally and professionally safe;
- > exploration of the benefits, and mitigation of the risks of different ways of working;
- > understanding and acceptance of cultural difference, its impact on all aspects of work and life, and the particular benefits this brings to a multicultural patient population;
- > understanding of the difficulties that accent, idiom and terminology can cause (both ways), and strategies to enable safe communication;
- > support for nurses to confidently challenge racism and damaging cultural stereotypes, whether from patients or other colleagues;
- > understanding of the isolation, professional deskilling and disruption of support networks migration brings; and
- > strategies to confidently and appropriately build friendly and collegial relationships.

Preparation of new IQN staff

Recruitment, induction and orientation of new staff are costly to organisations, to teams and to the individuals concerned.³ Adequate preparation, initial support and accurate matching of skills and expectations will increase retention in the face of local and international competition. Positive working environments and sufficient help with re-settlement may decrease drop out rates and increase gratitude and loyalty, producing happier, more productive staff. Motivation for migration can vary enormously, and different career stages bring different expectations. Understanding and matching or managing these motivations and expectations can really help reduce problems all round. Existing staff get fed up investing in new colleagues who move on quickly or

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who become demoralised, and new staff have considerable adjustments related to migration in addition to those experienced by all at the start of any new job.

While the fit between previous nursing education and practice differs between IQNs from different countries, preparatory and orientation needs should be assessed on an individual basis. It is important to determine and convey understanding of the complex and varied motivations (personal and professional) behind IQN migration. Common perceptions, as evidenced from a recent survey of attitudes, are that IQNs are 'only here for the money' or 'want a job rather than a vocation' or are 'life-stylers waiting out retirement'. Most nurses also have expectations of earning a fair wage for their education, responsibility and skills, and everyone's social and family situation is unique; assumptions and stereotypes are rarely helpful.

Before IQNs join the Aotearoa New Zealand nursing workforce

It is essential that new IQNs:

- > fully meet NZNC registration requirements;
- > complete adequate competency assessment and culturally appropriate cultural training programmes;
- > have realistic expectations of nursing roles and employment opportunities in this country;
- > have had adequate orientation to the Aotearoa New Zealand health system, and to nursing specialties and levels of practice autonomy or team work required;
- > are assisted to find posts that match their expectations, qualifications and experience, if not immediately, within a reasonable time frame on demonstration of competence and cultural safety;
- > know to whom they can turn for advice on the many practical issues, as they find their feet, eg immigration and residency pathways, driving licences, Inland Revenue or legal and employment advice.

Additional recommendations for employers

The following initiatives improve acculturation of IQNs and promote a more cohesive workforce⁴:

- > appointment, training and support of mentors, either well settled IQNs or volunteer host nursing staff;
- > managers and staff to introduce, implement and evaluate policies on bullying, explicitly adding IQNs as a potentially vulnerable group;
- > developing posters or other education resources for patients on the value of IQNs and their assessment as competent by the Nursing Council;
- > introducing, implementing and evaluating 'zero tolerance' of racism by patients, including poster reminders; and
- > initiating safe, confidential pathways for reporting and mitigating bullying or racism.

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Employers' and nursing colleagues' investment in helping IQNs adapt, both personally and professionally, will be well worth it; a better acculturated workforce, reduced tensions between colleagues, increased loyalty and longer retention will benefit all.

Further Information

Further information on practising in Aotearoa New Zealand is available on the following websites:

NZNO: www.nzno.org.nz

Nursing Council of New Zealand: www.nursingcouncil.org.nz

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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