

## Future role of the nurse

**A paper for the New Zealand Nurses Organisation – Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa (NZNO)**

### Introduction

Throughout the world and in Aotearoa New Zealand nurses provide support for all those who require health care. They are the backbone of the health system.

Nurses are central in ensuring patient safety and providing care directly to patients and their whānau. They play a crucial role in public safety including: monitoring, assessing and treating patients for clinical deterioration; detecting errors and near misses; understanding care processes and weaknesses inherent in some systems; identifying and communicating changes in patient condition; advocating and supporting whānau; and performing countless other tasks to ensure patients and their whānau remain safe, informed, involved and well.

Nurses are also crucial to timely coordination and communication of the patient's condition to health services. They regularly interact with physicians, pharmacists, whānau, and all other members of the health care team to ensure people receive high quality seamless care.

Nurses are often the human face that connects whānau to the health sector and health services to whānau. They are mediators between the health sector and patients and their whānau. For example, they are frequently required to translate the often-impenetrable language health professionals use to provide clear messages, advice and support to patients and their whānau.

As the human face of health, nurses are at the centre of addressing the health impacts of global challenges such as climate change, racism, sexism, class and political and economic instability, the global nurse shortage and the undervaluing of the role of the nurse to name a few. This paper outlines key challenges ahead for the nursing profession in this country and the impact on the future role of nurses.

Nurses struggle with a conservative model of care based on a patriarchal hierarchy that places them as handmaidens to doctors (even as the gender balance among doctors changes) and demeans the caring aspect of health care. This model of care is based on a western medical paradigm that imposes a world view that undervalues other world views and those who live by them.

The challenge for nurses is to restore the human side of health services, recognising that to heal requires a human connection based on mutual respect that is usually provided by the nurse.

### Nurses as health leaders

It is essential that the nursing profession moves into a greater leadership role as change agents and patient and community advocates, in order to better serve our communities. It is a rapidly changing world; a world where modern influences such as new biotechnology, artificial intelligence, an ageing population, higher levels of co-morbidities and acuity are creating a far greater level of need. In addition to these challenges is the impact of climate change that is unleashing unparalleled destruction of communities around the world, including Aotearoa.

## **Nurse practitioner**

A positive has been the growth of the nurse practitioner. Nurse practitioners are qualified through postgraduate study at Level 8 on the NZQA framework. This preparation is designed to complement and enhance knowledge and skills derived from nursing practice. Nurse practitioners are well trained, highly experienced nurses who deliver an excellent standard of care with the support of specialist medical colleagues if required. It is useful to note that while nurse practitioner training is different to that of a GP, nurse practitioners are equally skilled and able to provide high quality, accessible, equitable health care.

## **New technologies**

The upsurge of artificial intelligence (AI) within the health sector (for example) is part of the constant development of new technologies, creating new improvements in how we diagnose, support, and treat patients to achieve better outcomes. It is essential for nurses to actively develop their understanding of new technologies to become conceptualisers and creators of AI tools. Nurses will continue to lead the human interaction with communities and will ensure new technologies are used to enhance their health and not to dehumanise and alienate those who may not be comfortable with these technologies.

The response of nurses to Covid-19 in Aotearoa demonstrated that they were best placed to front the pandemic to protect their communities. NZNO pushed for correct PPE to be provided as nurses led clinics for testing that provided guidance, vaccinations and support for their communities. Nurses led the fight against Covid on many levels ensuring the delivery of high quality care and improving community health.

## **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Aotearoa New Zealand was established as a nation in 1840 by the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi between the British Crown and Māori iwi and hapū, the tangata whenua. It was through te Tiriti that the British Crown gained authority in New Zealand and the clauses of te Tiriti set the terms and responsibilities of that authority. The clauses have become accepted as:

- Kawanatanga: the Crown holds the responsibility to govern and protect the wellbeing of the nation.
- Tino rangatiratanga: iwi and hapū have the right to shape their own destiny.
- Ōritenga: the Crown treats Māori as equal to British citizens.

The Crown must honour and give effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi in the way health services work with Māori iwi, hapū and whānau. This obligation is set out in the Te Pae Ora Act of 2022.

As Aotearoa moves towards truly embracing te Tiriti o Waitangi, Tino rangatiratanga and Mana motuhake, there is an increasing population of te reo Māori speakers as a first language. Nurses will need to be well-versed in providing care that is culturally respectful and appropriate while also supporting the language of choice of Māori communities.

For Māori, te Tiriti guarantees Tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) and in health that means patients receiving support and care in a culturally safe way, and having the option of health care delivered in a way that meets their needs as Māori.

In understanding the health potential for Māori, it is important for nurses to recognise the growing Māori population and their right to engage in Te Ao Māori. It takes a generation (25 years) to achieve transformation. Nurses are part of the transformation and are responsible for shifting the direction to empower Māori to shift from a disease focus to a wellness focus.

## **Kawa whakaruruhau – cultural safety**

NZNO has a strong tradition of supporting *kawa whakaruruhau* – cultural safety for Māori, which recognises cultural dissonance as a potentially harmful to patients. Based on the works of Erihapeti Ramsden, who outlined how Māori patients bring their cultural identity with them as they access health services, these health services must do all they can to treat patients and their whānau with respect and not put up barriers to accessing adequate health by not recognising cultural needs.

To achieve this there is a need to develop and implement alternative bodies of knowledge and expertise and to look at new roles and nurse-led alternative models of care. Over past decades Māori nurses and others have successfully devised different ways of keeping people connected to health care services such as telehealth, and setting up nurse led clinics in alternative spaces such as marae, schools, mobile vans, home-based care, and in remote areas, including rural communities and isolated islands.

In order to achieve equitable health outcomes for Māori greater understanding and support from tauwi colleagues is required.

## **Wholistic care**

To continue this innovative approach to health, nurses look beyond the narrow bio-medical approach and move towards a wholistic vision of wellbeing. This includes looking at the whole of the whānau including considering their socio- economic situation. It means health care must fit the needs of whānau rather than the other way round. Consideration must also be given to issues of colonisation, racism, sexism, disability and other barriers to accessing needed health care.

## **Growing the number of Māori and Pasifika nurses**

Te Tiriti o Waitangi informs a need to focus on recruiting new nurses from those communities who have not been well served by health services in the past. This would require the Government, the health sector and Te Pūkenga to develop a strategy to support young Māori and Pasifika in entering nurse training. Key components would include fee support, pastoral care and improvements in the remuneration and conditions of nurses to attract and retain them.

NZNO believes training needs also to create clear career pathways for development to enable and encourage unregulated workers to grow their skill base and gain recognition and progress towards becoming enrolled and registered nurses. Nursing as a career should become a continuum of progress to reflect the interests and skills of nurses as well as the needs of their community.

This will ensure nursing has the capacity, skills (and potential for upskilling), and adaptability to support the increasing number of people with health, social and psychological needs, as too many people are currently unable to access services due to cost, availability, literacy, or lack of cultural appropriateness.

As with other health services, unregulated workers play a significant role in Māori providers. Positions such as kaiawhina have an important role in engaging with Māori whānau and their communities but should not be used to provide advanced clinical care. All workers in Māori health services should be supported to gain qualifications to ensure they can provide the highest quality of care.

## Nursing as a career choice

New Zealand nurses are ageing with the latest Nursing Council statistics (2019) showing 43 percent of nurses are over 50 years and 19 percent are over 60. There is no doubt these numbers have increased in 2023. These nurses have built up a substantial body of knowledge and experience and will retire during this decade. The changing attitudes of young people who may no longer see nursing as a positive career threaten the ability of this global workforce to impact change.

While nurse training in Aotearoa New Zealand is expensive and needs an overhaul, there is a growing international market for nurses, which threatens to attract New Zealand nurses out of our system. It also brings to New Zealand nurses trained in developing countries that are in desperate need of them. As wealthy neighbours plunder our nursing workforce we should not do the same to poorer countries with higher health needs.

The reliance on internationally qualified nurses (IQNs) has shown an unprecedented increase of 100 percent in the last five years from 1477 to 3013 new registrations per year in 2022. Overall, IQNs make up 32 percent of the total number of nurses with Annual Practising Certificates (APCs). This increase far exceeds the number of Māori nurses that hold APCs.

## Unregulated health workers

As the largest regulated health workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand, nurses represent over 50 percent of the regulated workforce population and supervise the work of the largest unregulated health workforce (health care assistants, caregivers, and support workers). NZNO represents both regulated and unregulated workers. By 'regulated' we mean nurses with formal qualifications and subject to the oversight of the Nursing Council.

A significant risk to the nursing profession is the growth of unregulated workers trained only to undertake specific tasks usually performed by nurses. Increasingly untrained workers are given limited training around specific tasks, through micro credentials. This enables workers to deliver medical care without a full understanding of the potential risks and essentially increases the risk of a reduction in the quality of care and, while it is a response to a lack of trained nurses, the answer is to train more not provide lower quality care.

Examples of unregulated workers who are increasingly used in place of trained and credentialed staff include anaesthesia assistants, paramedics, and physician associates. Registered nurses are often required to supervise and mentor unregulated workers, which becomes another burden on already overburdened nurses.

While NZNO supports new workers entering the workforce, it should not be at the expense of nurses. We believe all health workers should be able to seek training and support to gain qualifications that reflect their aspirations and be recognised and rewarded accordingly. This means the development of career pathways for these workers. The health sector has a duty of care to these workers to be the best they can be and to those patients who seek health care that they receive the best possible care by qualified staff.

NZNO needs to defend the role of nurses and reach out to unregulated workers to integrate them into the continuum of the nursing workforce.

## Privatisation

Health care is expensive and the health sector is constantly threatened with cuts to funding and, while this can drive efficiencies, the attractiveness of short cuts and cheaper options to governments can lead to risks of a diminished health service.

The most dangerous of drives towards efficiency is privatisation, which effectively shifts the health sector into a two-tiered system that provides better health care to those with better

incomes and who usually have better health. Those who struggle with poverty usually have higher health needs and yet are often denied effective treatments because of not being able to pay for it.

Māori and Pasifika peoples are particularly disadvantaged by the existing structure and many of the disparities are caused by poor access to health services that is the result of the gatekeeper role that general practitioners play. Privatisation has also led to disparities in nurses' wages between public and private and has been used to diminish working conditions of nurses.

In Aotearoa New Zealand Primary Health Care is often delivered by private interests and this is one of the biggest barriers to the wellbeing of those struggling with poverty. Primary Health Care is the first and most important face of health services to communities and the cost barriers on those living with poverty prevent access to effective health care. Private ownership of health services places cost barriers to health services that restrict access of care to those who need it most.

This does not apply to community owned services such as Māori and Pasifika health and social services including Whānau Ora, who have greatly increased access to health care for Māori, Pasifika and low income whānau, as evidenced by the Covid crisis.

## Conclusion

Nurses will face new challenges over the coming decade. It is expected that by 2033, the nursing profession will look very different than it does today and will need to provide care for a different type of world. As the population, health sector and society change so too will the role of nurses, making it more important for nurses to move into leadership positions and be collaborative partners with other health care workers and others in non-health care settings.

Nurses focus strongly on the social determinants of health, health promotion, disease prevention, Primary Health Care and services that are people-centred and community based. This is especially evident within Māori and iwi services which generally operate in areas of high needs and underserved populations.

Nurses are key patient advocates and are well positioned to address the persistent disparities and inequities in health that relate to poverty, structural racism, and discrimination. There is an increased need for quality, diverse mental health care. Rates of depression, suicide, anxiety, trauma, stress and substance abuse, have been increasing sharply over the years, and they are now part of the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

The future nurse will require training and competency development skills to prepare them as advanced practice nurses. Nurses will be change-agents in developing ways to deliver health care and social care to their community. Effective nursing practices are already eliminating gaps and disparities in health by moving outside of acute care settings and taking health care to the people.

Nursing can be an effective health safety net for people who are not accessing GP and other services. Failure to invest in this safety net will be a wasted opportunity, will create greater health inequities and be more expensive in the longer-term.

## Summary of specific challenges

| Challenges   | Future risks  | Future role  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</b>  | The Crown must honour and give effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi in the way health services work with Māori iwi, hapū and whānau. Nurses should lead this and promote tino rangatiratanga and oritenga. This includes recognising tikanga Māori across all health services and the importance of giving voice and choice to Māori communities and supporting by Māori for Māori health services.   | The future will see nurses promoting and advocating for better health while leading the charge to improve health equity and to create communities in which everyone has access to high quality care.<br><br>Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides the foundation for health development for all people in Aotearoa New Zealand and nurses will be at the forefront of actualising te Tiriti in the provision and future development of all health care.  |
| <b>Te reo</b>  | Māori is an official language of Aotearoa. This is recognised and strongly supported by Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa - NZNO. Nurses must be committed to promoting te reo and champion positive outcomes for Māori.   | Government target of 1 million speakers of basic te reo by 2040 is on track to be achieved. Nurses will be required to be amongst those.   |
| <b>Intersectionality: sexism, racism and structural barriers to nurses</b> | Health services are part of the structural institutions of society and often reflect conservative power balances within society.<br><br>Nursing has always been a force for promoting women’s careers, but they do not impact on health policy anyway near as much as they should, given nurses make up the largest single group within the health sector.<br><br>Part of the reason for this is sexism that gives primacy to the diagnostic role of doctors and under recognises the caring aspect nurses provide – and both are needed for healing those in need.<br><br>Racism, ableism, homophobia, and class are further barriers that restrict our more vulnerable communities from engaging in the health sector and finding the care they need.<br><br>These barriers compound, and untangling the often-debilitating impact is often challenging but essential if we are to achieve equity in society, and that’s good for our health. | While the prejudice of individuals and communities can be reduced by education, these ignorances also require active challenges by nurses and their representatives: Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO.<br><br>This should be a priority of all health services, but nurses are best placed to lead advocacy. They already often do but are unrecognised by a health system that privileges those with money and voice.<br><br>Giving voice to the vulnerable is as important as any treatment in building the wellbeing of vulnerable communities.<br><br>Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO needs to provide protection to nurses and other health workers who advocate for the vulnerable. |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Diversity, equity and inclusion within all systems and sectors</b></p> | <p>The current restructure of the health sector is driven by past failures to deliver quality care to Māori and Pasifika communities. NZNO must be seen as leaders in ensuring the health sector meets the needs of those communities. NZNO is committed to driving a greater focus in recruiting Māori and Pasifika students into nursing. NZNO must also continue to build links with Māori and Pasifika health services and seek to recruit nurses, kaiawhina and other allied health workers from these services.</p> <p>For health outcomes to improve for Māori and Pasifika communities, greater autonomy must be given to these localities to shape their own destiny, including building their own health services. For Māori this reflects Tino rangatiratanga as set out in Article II of te Tiriti o Waitangi.</p>  | <p>The population is expected to become more ethnically diverse over the next 20 years. Nurses will be required to be equally diverse and have a deeper knowledge of the importance of cultural safety.</p> <p>Nurses were first to embrace Kawa whakaruruhau as fundamental knowledge to cultural safety in Aotearoa and need to continue to provide leadership to the health sector to ensure disparities in health are eliminated.</p>  |
| <p><b>Epidemics, pandemic and health emergencies</b></p>                     | <p>The COVID emergency has made clear the devastating impact pandemics and infectious diseases can have at a global level.</p> <p>The impact on health services is significant and complex.</p> <p>As frontline staff and first responders nurses were exposed to COVID at a time when the disease was poorly understood, and protections were often inadequate. As a result nurses were at high risk of catching COVID.</p> <p>As the understanding of COVID increased the risk shifted from infection towards exhaustion as demands on nurses to maintain other health services continued. This was all while ensuring COVID protocols were upheld and COVID patients were looked after alongside other patients, while carrying the responsibility of protecting their whānau and themselves from infection.</p> <p>In addition to their professional duties, nurses became community and whānau leaders organising their whānau and communities and promoting safe practices within the whānau by communicating their knowledge out to the community.</p> <p>The development of a social media driven conspiracy around COVID presented a particularly direct challenge to nurses as misinformation led to direct (often aggressive) confrontation with whānau, neighbours, and others from within their communities that can be challenging at a personal level.</p> | <p>Nurses need to be ready to respond effectively to emerging disease and the inevitable arrival of new pandemics. Although nurses have a duty of care, they have learnt that this does not occur without limits and any risk to personal safety must be considered when providing care during pandemic or disaster situations.</p> <p>However, serious consideration needs to be given to the readiness of Aotearoa New Zealand nurses to respond to the potential implications of further global health issues. Pandemic and disease disaster plans have been well and truly tested and show that our health system was not prepared.</p> <p>Nurses must be part of the national planning groups for all future preparations. Nursing cannot manage pandemics in isolation from the rest of the team. Nursing standards of practice need to reflect the needs of an emergency.</p> |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Poverty and social unrest</b>  | There is a clear relationship between poverty and poor health. The health needs of the poor include improved housing, better education and a more equitable justice system. These are not directly under the control of the health sector but must be considered if disparities in health are to diminish.   | Advocacy for the vulnerable is a fundamental responsibility of health unions and for Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO in particular.   |
| <b>Nurses' professional development to learn new knowledge and skills</b> | While biotechnology is not new to health care, the growing reliance on biotechnology has threatened to reduce the human element in the health system. This tends to shift the focus to a more biological approach, which often ignores the social, psychological, and environmental aspects of people's wellbeing. Again, this creates an opportunity for nurses to lead a more people- and community-centred approach.  | Nurses will need to extend their scope of diversity to be conceptualisers, developers and implementors of new technology.<br><br>Existing models of care are unlikely to meet changing population health needs and new approaches are needed.<br><br>Demands on nurses to be actively involved in research, to meet health needs, and to develop, implement and evaluate new models of care are increasing. |
| <b>Value of nurses</b>  | <p>Recognising the value of nurses is fundamental to protecting the integrity and capacity of the health sector.</p> <p>During Covid-19, the rapid deliberation to transfer nurses' roles to new and unregulated health workers showed how the role of the nurse was not valued.</p> <p>Instead of concentrating on recruitment and retention of nurses and growing our own, nurse roles were transferred to the unregulated workforce and other titles and training have been developed to fix the nurses workforce shortage – all this without prior input from nurses or their union.</p> <p>With the constant changes in social conditions, environmentally, politically, culturally, social media, climate challenges and growing instability internationally; we are seeing a diminishment in the role of the nurse when nurses are most needed.</p> | <p>Nurses need Pay Parity, and Pay Equity.</p> <p>Nurses should reflect the communities they serve so a greater effort needs to be made to encourage Māori and Pasifika nurses to work in their communities.</p> <p>The role of the nurse needs to be better understood by those who control funding and those who are the decision makers.</p>   |
| <b>Specialist care general nurses</b>                                     | As the population in Aotearoa ages, a crisis looms over the balance of retirees and workers, and this has a number of challenges for nurses.   | Nurses will be required to have a greater scope of knowledge. This will require better access to professional development to allow nurses to grow and to have more flexibility across the   |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>Firstly, health needs grow with age, so an ageing population presents significant challenges to health services to meet these growing needs.</p> <p>Secondly, nurses have a higher average age than the general population and that is a key factor in the growing crisis in nursing numbers.</p> <p>Thirdly, different populations have significantly different age profiles, which means young workers are increasingly Māori, Pasifika or other ethnicities.</p> <p>This should give greater weight to the importance of growing those communities in training nurses.</p> | <p>sector giving nurses wider opportunity to maintain interest in their work.</p>  |
| <p><b>Growth of technologies including artificial intelligence and biotechnology</b></p> | <p>The growing role of technology can reduce the autonomy and capacity of health workers on the frontline. AI is the latest development in technology, but it is difficult to see how it can replace most diagnostics, as these usually require direct face-to-face examination.</p> <p>This could provide an opportunity for nurses to lead public understanding of the essential benefit of face-to-face connection on a human level.</p>  | <p>Nurses must be involved from conceptualisation, development through to implementation of new technologies in health including AI nursing tools. At the very least, nurses will need to be trained in the growing use of sensor-based technology, mobile technology, voice assistance and robotics.</p>  |
| <p><b>The growth of an unregulated workforce</b></p>                                     | <p>The growth of unregulated workers, who are increasingly used in place of trained and credentialed nurses, can be seen as unintentionally undermining nurses and ultimately the quality of health care delivered to our communities.</p> <p>Despite this, nurses are usually required to supervise and mentor unregulated workers which becomes an added responsibility on an already overburdened workforce.</p>  | <p>NZNO needs to defend the role of the nurse and also reach out to unregulated workers to integrate them into the continuum of the nursing workforce.</p>   |
| <p><b>Climate change</b></p>   | <p>The growing impact of climate change has become the single greatest threat to wellbeing on a global level. The disruption from the severity of weather driven disasters again places nurses as frontline first responders under great pressure and at times in direct danger. A call for sustainable ecological policies is consistent with a more humane and fair society and nurses should be visible supporters of strong climate policies.</p>  | <p>Global climate change has resulted in an increase in extreme weather events. Aotearoa has experienced this first hand. These extreme weather events create disaster conditions displacing large numbers of people and forcing them to live in crowded, unhygienic conditions.</p> <p>Nurses are cut off from their place of work during time of highest need.</p> |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  |   | Greater planning is required to address these issues and nurses must be part of that planning.   |
| <b>Funding challenges</b>  | Health is an expensive public sector investment and there is a constant pressure on health services and health workers to be frugal in the use of health dollars. It makes the cost of labour extremely political. Nurses are the largest workforce in health and so, as their union, NZNO needs to constantly link the wellbeing of health workers, to the effectiveness of health services and therefore community wellbeing.   | NZNO must defend the public health system and advocate for fair access to all to receive adequate health services to meet their needs.   |
| <b>Privatisation</b>   | Privatisation is often seen as a way to cut costs, despite strong evidence that private health care is both less effective and more expensive. Protecting community health as a public good (and therefore publicly funded) needs to be central to NZNO strategies. This includes rolling back existing services that sit primarily in the private sector despite their importance to community wellbeing such as primary or dental health.   | Private health care exacerbates the divide in Aotearoa between rich and poor and has created disparities in wages between those working in private and public health services – and this can be used to drive wages and conditions down.   |
| <b>Growing international instability, including potential for war and refugees</b> | War, while unlikely in Aotearoa, does challenge the nursing profession as war torn regions have a high need for nurses and health services and may be a draw upon nurses responding to those with highest need.<br><br>Increasing populism and nationalism present a greater regional and global risk of war.<br><br>There is an impact of the global economy on the provision of health care and globalisation and global climate change have already shown to impact on the way nursing care will be provided in the future.<br>Globalisation is putting the social cohesion of many countries under stress and health systems are struggling to cope with the demands of a globalised world. Economic decisions affecting people in all corners of the world are influenced by global conditions | While trends of populism, nationalism and global economy impact on health, it is essential that nurses and their union Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO continually advocate for recognition of our common humanity to ensure that the vulnerable are protected in this unstable world. |
| <b>Growing understanding of wellbeing</b>  | Communities should be served by the health sector to meet their needs, and there must be a holistic understanding that the health and wellbeing of individuals are reflections of their community and their place in society.   | There will be increasing demands on nurses to be actively involved in research, to develop and integrate new technology and treatment modalities to meet health needs, and to develop, implement and evaluate new models of care.  |