

# **College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses (COASTN)**

## **Position Statement on the Provision of Flight Nursing Education**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

These standards represent the views of the College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses (COASTN) on what constitutes the educational requirements necessary for flight nurses to deliver safe and effective flight nursing practice.

Flight Nurses must extend the principles of novice through to expert (Benner, 2001) nursing practice in the aviation environment. Recognition that the provision of competent flight nursing practice requires sound knowledge and understanding of the physiological effects of altitude and the aviation environment is essential.

### **PURPOSE**

The education policy of the College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses in combination with the following documents:

- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Standards (2023)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Competency Framework (2023)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Wellness Position Statement embedded in COASTN Standards of Practice (2023)
- Air Ambulance/Air Search and Rescue Service Standard version 3.0: 2018
- NZ 8156 Ambulance, Paramedicine and Patient Transfer Services (2019).
- National Entry, Education, Training and Maintenance Criteria for Flight Nurses in New Zealand (2023)

This position statement has been developed to assist in the creation of a highly skilled and professional workforce whose work is undertaken in a unique and potentially hostile environment without the resources normally afforded when working 'on the ground' in a hospital environment. Further, it must be recognised that some referring hospitals in New Zealand that flight nurses are retrieving from also have minimal resources.

### **CONTEXT**

In an industry where safety is paramount, standards, rules and regulations are regularly reviewed and updated, and dynamic, up-to-date education for flight nurses is vital so that they may work safely with patients, families and other health personnel and crew in various hospital settings and aircraft.

Due to the nature of the work, flight nursing is a stand-alone specialised area of practice. It varies considerably from all other areas of nursing due to the dynamics of the work and work environments. This includes but is not limited to:

- Retrieving critically ill patients from referring hospitals.
- Working in constantly changing environments that require intellectual and physical adaptability, requiring rapid 'thinking on the go'.
- Well-developed communication skills.
- Working with changing personnel requires the ability to quickly form collegial working relationships with staff, families, relatives and extended support persons of the patient.

- Well-developed assessment skills and the knowledge and skills of how to appropriately and safely respond to the assessment findings.
- The ability to be assertive and articulate and to demonstrate initiative.
- The ability to manage crisis situations without the usual resources, including personnel.
- The ability to manage crisis situations outside the hospital environment and at altitude.
- Knowledge of the physical effects of altitude on patients, equipment, crew, and oneself and to apply that knowledge to the working diagnosis of the patient.
- The differing effects of pressurised and non-pressurised aircraft and the consequences for patients, crew, equipment and oneself.
- Aviation crew resource management (CRM) skills and understanding of pertinent aviation language.
- How to safely prepare patients for transfer for all aspects of transfer
- Knowledge of one's own 'fitness to fly' and 'safety to fly.'
- The ability to work in isolation and an isolating environment (for many NZ flight nurses, working in isolation means being the only health professional accompanying the patient at altitude and at either end of the transfer).
- The ability to work in confined spaces within the transport environment.

### **CORE COMPETENCIES**

- Current New Zealand Nursing Practising Certificate
- Minimum five years of postgraduate experience in Critical/Intensive Care Nursing, Emergency Nursing/High Dependency Nursing in a secondary or tertiary hospital
- Core Advanced Rescuer New Zealand Resuscitation Council (College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Competency Framework)
- Annual aircraft familiarisation and emergency procedures certificate
- Land and water-based survival skills and Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET) at least once every two years (if participating in overwater operations greater than ten nautical miles offshore) (Air Search and Rescue Service Standard, 2018, p.43)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Wellness Position Statement

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - ONGOING EDUCATION**

- Initial orientation and ongoing education within employers' flight service
- Successful completion of a formal structured aeromedical training course that meets the current NZ industry standards (e.g., COASTN Aeromedical Course for Flight Nurses)
- Postgraduate education related to the aeromedical environment is available through Otago University, New Zealand, James Cook and Bond Universities in Australia.
- Each year COASTN runs a one-day symposium, and on occasion, this symposium aligns with national/international conferences.
- International conferences, including the annual Aeromedical Society of Australasia (ASA).
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Emagazine
- COASTN education calendar is available on COASTN website.

## REFERENCES

Benner, P. (2001) From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice. *Commemorative Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

New Zealand Search and Rescue (2018) Air ambulance/air search and rescue service standard Version 3.0

