

College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses (COASTN) Position Statement on the Provision of Flight Nursing Education



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 be able to deliver safe and effective flight nursing practice.

Flight Nurses must extend the principles of novice through to expert (Benner, 1984) nursing practice into 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 (2011) (due to be updated)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Competency Framework (2014)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Wellness Position Statement
- Air Ambulance/Air Search and Rescue Service Standard version 2.0: 2013 (currently under review)

This policy 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 needs to be recognised that some referring hospitals in New Zealand that flight nurses are retrieving from, also have very limited resources.

CONTEXT

In an industry where safety is paramount, and standards, rules and regulations are regularly reviewed and updated, 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 a variety of 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 requiring the ability to quickly form collegial working relationship 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, articulate and to demonstrate initiative.
- The ability to manage crisis situations without the usual resources.
- 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 versus non pressurised aircraft and the effects on patients, crew and oneself.
- Aviation crew resource management (CRM) skills and understanding of pertinent aviation language.
- How to safely 'package' patients whether critically ill and being transferred to an intensive care unit or being transferred for further intervention/investigations at a tertiary hospital.
- Knowledge of one's own 'wellness to fly'
- The ability to work in isolation and in 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 both at the referring hospitals and within the fixed wing (FW) and rotary wing (RW) aircraft.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- Current practising certificate (NZNC)
- Minimum two years postgraduate experience in critical care or emergency
- Level 6 NZRC (College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Competency Framework)
- Yearly aircraft familiarisation and emergency procedures certificate
- Land based survival skills and HUET training at least once every two years (if participating in over water operations greater than 10 nautical miles offshore) (Air Search and Rescue Service Standard, 2013, p.33)
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Wellness Position Statement

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - ONGOING EDUCATION

- Initial orientation and ongoing education within own flight service of aviation medicine
- Successful completion of the College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses (COASTN) 5 day annual aeromedical retrieval course (it is expected that all flight nurses nationally attend this course but they must have accumulated at least 6 months flight experience prior to applying to go on the course)
- Postgraduate education related to the aeromedical environment is available through Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Otago University or James Cook and Bond Universities in Australia. The Royal Flying doctors Service (Queensland) runs the STARS programme.
- Each year COASTN runs a one day symposium and every second year this symposium aligns with another related national conference.
- International conferences include the annual Aeromedical Society of Australasia (ASA).
- College of Air and Surface Transport Nurses Up and Away magazine

REFERENCES

- Benner, P. (1984). From Novice to expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- New Zealand Search and Rescue. (2013). Air ambulance / air search and rescue service standard Version 2.0.