



Frequently Asked Questions: Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist

Under the direction of the Joint Communication Statement from the Medical Sciences Council of New Zealand and the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2012) 'the Perioperative Nurses College of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation has agreed to develop a definition and competencies/ skills/standards for anaesthetic nurses

The Perioperative Nurses College (PNC) released a consultation document on the 'Knowledge & Skills Framework for the Registered Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist' in April 2014 which is available on the PNC website www.pnc.org.nz. The Knowledge and Skills document raised a number of questions from individuals and organisations. This 'Frequently Asked Question' Fact Sheet aims to address these questions.

Roles, Titles & Regulation

Q1: What roles and titles are used when describing the New Zealand Anaesthetic Assistant Workforce?

- Anaesthetic Assistant: An overarching term used to describe the anaesthetic assistant *role*. There are approximately 700 anaesthetic assistants in NZ. 90% are anaesthetic technicians (AT) and 10% are nurses.
- Registered Nurse (RN), Enrolled Nurse (EN), Anaesthetic Technician (AT): Protected *titles* under the HPCA Act (2003) that is restricted to persons holding an annual practising certificate of that profession.
- RN or EN Assistant to the Anaesthetist: Describes a *field of nursing*, much the same as 'cardiac nurse', 'diabetes nurse', is used to describe nurses working in those particular fields.

Q2: Is the nurse providing assistance to the anaesthetist a new or expanded nursing development? No. New Zealand RNs & ENs are able to provide assistance to the anaesthetist within their existing RN or EN scope of practice.

Q3: Do nurses need to hold RN or EN / anaesthetic technician dual registration to provide assistance to the anaesthetist? No. Nurses are able to provide assistance to the anaesthetist through their RN or EN annual practising certificate. There is no regulatory requirement for RNs or ENs to hold dual AT registration.

Anaesthetic Assistant Workforce Demands

Q4: Is there a New Zealand workforce shortage of anaesthetic assistants?

The Anaesthetic Assistant Workforce includes both Anaesthetic Technicians and Nurses. Immigration New Zealand identify Anaesthetic Technicians as an immediate skills shortage in all regions. There is currently no workforce shortage of nurses.

Nursing is an under-utilised skilled workforce and resource that has the capability to respond to and meet anaesthetic assistant workforce demands and/or changes. Perioperative nurses are a broad and flexible workforce within the operating room environment: providing either scrub nurse, circulating nurse, or assistance to the anaesthetist.

Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist preparation

Q5: What education and training is available for the Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist?

As with all fields of nursing, employers provide workplace orientation/preceptorship based on nursing experience, specialty, and individual learning needs.

Some nurses have undertaken the Diploma or Graduate Certificate Anaesthetic Technology training provided by Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in conjunction with MSCNZ accredited training hospitals. However these courses are designed in preparation for AT examination and registration.

In 2015, RNs can enrol in a Certificate of Proficiency, RN Assistant to the Anaesthetist paper through the Auckland of University (pending AUT Board approval). The AUT Certificate of Proficiency RNAA course provides nurses access to a special interest nursing paper in their chosen field, just as many other nursing fields have. This does not preclude alternative types of RNAA courses being developed in the future. There is currently no plans for an EN Assistant to the Anaesthetist course.

Q6: Who will the RNAA Course appeal to? Perioperative nurses wishing to gain a portable nursing qualification through a Nursing Council of New Zealand post graduate nursing programme. (*Enrolling in the RNAA course does not mitigate employer's responsibility in providing workplace orientation and preceptorship*).

Q7: Do nurses have to undertake an anaesthetic assistant course in accordance with the ANZCA (2012) PS08 document? No. The Nursing Council of New Zealand regulates NZ nursing practice. Professional organisations can make recommendations but cannot mandate nursing training and education.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (2012) PS08 document 'Recommendations on the Assistant to the Anaesthetist' advises Anaesthetic Assistant training for those without previous health sector experience is three years; ENs two years; and RNs one year.

There is no mandatory requirement for RNAs to enrol in such a course; however PNC recommends that RNs undertake formal education and training to achieve the competency criteria of the PNC (2014) RNAA Knowledge & Skills Framework.

PNC recommends that ENs with anaesthetic assistant experience explore AT registration.

Certificate of Proficiency: Registered Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist Course

Q8: Which educational institution will be offering an RNAA course in early 2015?

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) will be piloting a Certificate of Proficiency RNAA course (pending AUT Board approval) in early 2015. The Certificate of Proficiency is a 30 point paper offered through AUT's post graduate nursing programme.

Q9: Are there any restrictions on the RN perioperative work setting in order to enrol in the Certificate of Proficiency RNAA course?

No. Perioperative nurses enrolling in the RNAA course can be employed in small or large, public or private surgical hospitals. Nurses require access to a workplace Mentor and Assessor. Pre-requisite criteria and employer responsibilities are noted in the Knowledge & Skills Framework for the RNAA, pg. 19 -20.

The Certificate of Proficiency RNAA Course is designed for registered nurses and delivered by an educational institute accredited with the NCNZ. Whether nurses work in an MSCNZ accredited training hospital or not has no relationship to nursing courses.

Q10: How much will the AUT Certificate of Proficiency RNAA Course cost and who will fund this?

As at May 2014, funding options are being explored. Throughout 2014, updates will be provided by PNC and AUT on fees and funding options.