

PRESS RELEASE from the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia and New Zealand): for August 24, 2004

Twenty years ago, on August 24, 1984, the professional preparation of nurses in Australia took a giant step forward. The Commonwealth Government decided that registered nurses would in future be educated in universities instead of the hospital-based training that had been the practice until then. The last intake of trainees into hospitals was in 1990 and from 1993 onwards there have been no trainees employed in hospitals in Australia.

The move was sponsored in Cabinet jointly by Susan Ryan, Minister for Education, and Neal Blewett, Minister for Health. In his speech to the Parliament, Minister Blewett said:

“The Government believes that this decision will bring benefits to the health care area. First of all, it will provide a better educated and more flexibly trained nursing profession. Secondly, it will create greater employment opportunities for fully trained nurses. Thirdly, it will bring occupational and vocational benefits, particularly to women. Fourthly, it will certainly help to underwrite the status of nursing as a major profession in the health care field.”

With new discoveries and new technologies in health care, nursing has become more complex, more science-based and more demanding. There is an emphasis on seeing the patient as a whole person, not a collection of ailments or symptoms. In our multicultural society, nurses need to be aware of the range of customs and values held by patients. Preparation for this expanded role of nurses is best carried out in universities, and several reviews since 1993 have endorsed this approach.

On this 20th anniversary, the Council of Deans recalls that nurses across Australia lobbied, took action and marched in the streets in support of tertiary education. The Council salutes the many nursing bodies and women’s organizations and the individual leaders whose long campaigns finally led to this advance, which has benefited both nurses and the whole Australian community.

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