

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN NURSING (GENERAL PRACTICE)

BACKGROUND

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and the Sunshine Coast Division of General Practice (SCDGP) initially, sought to develop collaborations in teaching, research and regional engagement. The Graduate Certificate in Nursing [General Practice] (GCNGP) creates opportunities for USC and SCDGP in all of these areas. In teaching it represents an innovative approach to continuing professional education; in research it could lead to outputs in both the field of practice nursing and the sub-discipline of higher education; and it exemplifies regional engagement.

The collaboration between USC and the SCDGP in relation to the GCNGP has led to a partnership between USC and the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN). Through this partnership, the GCNGP is to be recognized as a nationally endorsed qualification and its delivery is to achieve national coordination.

This paper describes the GCNGP and its management, and the outcomes it can deliver in teaching and research.

THE ROLE OF THE SCDGP AND THE AGPN

The SCDGP initiated the development of the GCNGP and has commenced delivering the program on the Sunshine Coast. In addition, the SCDGP has attracted national attention to the program. Divisions of general practice around Australia have expressed keen interest in being involved in delivering the program and to this stage the SCDGP has acted informally as a broker for the program. While the SCDGP will always maintain a special interest in the program in partnership with USC, particularly in relation to quality improvement, including through practitioner research, national coordination of the program will become the responsibility of the AGPN. To this end USC and the AGPN have entered into a memorandum of understanding in relation to the delivery of the GCNGP.

THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

General practice nursing represents a critical area of nursing but professional development in this form of nursing is underdeveloped and to date there has been no national uptake of a single post graduate qualification in general practice nursing. In addition, it has been demonstrated that existing and aspiring general practice nurses are unwilling or unable to commit to what they tend to view as time-consuming and expensive postgraduate training programs. There is an urgent need for a professional development program such as this that leads to a nationally recognized qualification delivered flexibly and inexpensively throughout Australia.

The GCNGP is potentially very significant in the context of the shortage of doctors in Australia and the growth of the profession of general practice nursing. The demand for general practice nurses is fuelled by the need for general practitioners to engage in more specialized medicine. General practice nurses are able to fulfill a range of general practice functions that improve the efficiency of general practice and the quality of health care. General practice nurses can play a key role in improved health provision.

PROGRAM DESIGN

The GCNGP is a program comprising four courses accredited by USC and endorsed by the AGPN.

The intended learning outcomes of the program are:

- ☐ Knowledge of the Australian Health Care system
- ☐ Knowledge of current primary health care initiatives
- ☐ Knowledge of appropriate standards, quality care requirements and information/resource management
- ☐ Knowledge and skill required for advanced assessment and management of clients with physical alterations
- ☐ Knowledge and skill required for advanced assessment and management of clients with mental health alterations
- ☐ An ability to critique current professional, legal and ethical nursing issues
- ☐ An ability to undertake community/unit analysis and plan research
- ☐ An ability to improve client health outcomes through health education and health promotion
- ☐ An ability to contribute to the effective and efficient management of the work environment
- ☐ An ability to integrate best practice

The titles of the three prescribed courses are:

- Practice Nursing 1
- Practice Nursing 2
- Advanced Health Assessment

The fourth course is an elective chosen from a range of relevant nursing courses provided by USC.

The program embodies the following design features:

- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ Affordability
- ☐ Accessibility

PROGRAM DELIVERY

The GCNGP is delivered jointly by USC and participating divisions of general practice throughout Australia.

Divisions of general practice will be authorized to deliver the GCNGP upon signing an agreement with the AGPN.

The three prescribed courses are delivered by participating divisions and the elective course is delivered online by USC.

For the delivery of all courses USC provides participants and teachers full access to USC library resources.

USC will also provide participants and teachers a GCNGP web page for communication and ease of access to learning resources.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The GCNGP is managed as follows:

Program Accreditation

The GCNGP, including its courses, is accredited by USC and endorsed by the AGPN.

Program Structure

Upon certified satisfactory completion of the three prescribed courses delivered by participating divisions of general practice, applying participants will be admitted as students of USC to undertake the fourth course online and will be granted full credit for the three prescribed courses. After successfully completing the fourth course participants will be awarded the GCNGP from USC.

Participant Administration

Participants will be recruited, admitted and enrolled in the three prescribed courses by participating divisions of general practice. From commencement, participants will have access to USC learning resources through the USC library. Participant progress will be monitored, and completion recorded, by participating divisions.

Staff

The GCNGP will be taught and assessed by qualified and experienced tutors appointed by participating divisions of general practice.

There will be a program coordinator at USC who will be a staff member of the Faculty of Science, Health and Education.

There will be a program coordinator within each participating division of general practice nominated by those divisions.

AGPN will nominate a national coordinator and a national tutor.

All tutors will be admitted to a national register administered by the AGPN.

Program Quality

The quality of the program will be maintained through:

- ☐ Accreditation and re-accreditation (every 5 years) of the program through USC
- ☐ Endorsement of the program through the AGPN
- ☐ External review of the program (every 7 years) through USC
- ☐ Course evaluation (every 2-3 years) through USC
- ☐ Monitoring of the program by the relevant USC Faculty Academic Advisory Committee
- ☐ Use of USC's Student Feedback on Teaching and Student Feedback on Courses gathered and applied by participating divisions of general practice
- ☐ Appointment of tutors by participating divisions of general practice and registration of Tutors with the AGPN and the USC program coordinator
- ☐ Professional development of tutors provided through USC
- ☐ Moderation of assessment conducted by participating divisions of general practice and the AGPN according to the Quality Assessment Framework (attached)
- ☐ Annual fine-tuning evaluation and improvement of courses by tutors
- ☐ Ongoing liaison between USC, AGPN and participating divisions with relevant professional groups

OUTCOMES

The following outcomes are anticipated from this program, the collaboration between USC and the SCDGP, and the partnership between USC the ADGP in connection with the program:

Teaching

- ☐ A nationally endorsed qualification for general practice nurses
- ☐ A national exemplar of flexible and innovative continuing professional education
- ☐ A potential flagship area for USC in innovative continuing professional education
- ☐ Potential collaborative R&D projects in learning and teaching funded by the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and national teaching awards
- ☐ Potential for extending the partnership to New Zealand and beyond
- ☐ Increasing uptake of postgraduate coursework programs by general practice nurses
- ☐ New clinical placement opportunities for trainee nurses

Research

- ☐ Potential applied research projects funded by the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grants program
- ☐ Opportunities for publication of research in refereed journals
- ☐ Increasing uptake of higher degree by research programs by general practice nurses

QUALITY MODERATION: Graduate Certificate of Nursing (General Practice)

Background

Within the broader quality assurance arrangement for the Graduate Certificate in Nursing [General Practice] (GCNGP), this framework ensures that student assessment is valid and reliable, and that appropriate educational standards are maintained. This Framework is administered by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN)

Principles

The framework embodies the following principles:

1. Excellent student assessment practices are applied consistently across all participants, courses and iterations of the program
2. Student assessment is clearly aligned with learning activities and intended learning outcomes
3. Delivery of courses is consistent with course outlines
4. Student assessment practices are valid, fair, flexible and driven by explicit assessment criteria
5. Educational standards are maintained at a level commensurate with postgraduate coursework in nursing programs across the Australian higher education sector

National Moderation of Assessment

Consistency of grading of assessment tasks and educational standards across the participating Divisions will be achieved by:

1. According to the national moderation schedule developed by AGPN (whereby all tutors would participate in moderation) each tutor submits a sample of student work to the national tutor;
2. This sample will consist of:
Portfolios of assessment tasks , for a student performing within the range defined by the USC grading system (HD, D, C, P, F) within one course.
3. The national tutor considers the portfolios in order to:
 - ☐ Collect and distribute to all tutors, with informed student consent, a range of model answers for tutors;
 - ☐ Provide feedback to tutors participating in moderation at that time;
 - ☐ Determine appropriate professional development and training for tutors; and
 - ☐ Explore areas for improvement in task descriptions, assessment criteria and standards descriptors
 - ☐ Address areas where a dispute over assessment might arise

4. These activities will be described in an annual report on assessment moderation produced by the national tutor and distributed to all tutors and the Course Coordinator USC

A collegial culture for moderation

In addition to the formal requirements for moderation described here, AGPN will foster a culture in which tutors are supported and encouraged to informally engage with other tutors for discussion of assessment outcomes, comparing of grading decisions and critical-self reflection on assessment practices and pedagogy. The National Tutor will provide support and assistance to tutors who are less experienced or confident in their delivery.