



EFN POSITION STATEMENT ON SKILL NEEDS, SKILL MIX AND TASK SHIFTING IN NURSING

In all European countries the transfer of skills has gained momentum in the last few years. The need for healthcare is changing in society and therefore the nursing profession must develop new competencies, roles and responsibilities. There has been a shifting of tasks between physicians and nurses, and between nurses and healthcare assistants and others. This development creates new demands, challenges and opportunities for the nursing profession. Healthcare systems must redefine and clarify occupational qualifications, roles and responsibilities. Governments and policy makers need to adapt legislation in order to support these changes. It is critical that the profession actively leads these developments.

The change in skills and skill mix has been stimulated by the following developments:

- An increasing demand for high quality in healthcare, in acute hospital care, as a consequence of the shift to deliver more care in the Community and in long term healthcare;
- An increasing need to contain costs and to increase effective use of scarce resources, such as high skilled nurse labour in healthcare. The financial crisis since 2008 has accelerated the need to contain costs;
- An increasing need for improved career perspectives for nurses and other professionals in healthcare;
- The development of new technology, demanding a high level of flexibility and ability to adjust;
- An increasing number of chronically ill persons and individuals managing long terms conditions with increasing demand for health prevention and education services;
- Recruitment and retention of nurses.

The nursing profession has become more knowledge-intensive, with a corresponding rise in requirements for qualifications and technical skills. Nurses have acquired a broad range of generic, transferable skills. Nurses' work has become increasingly dynamic, with a requirement for flexibility, continuous learning and individual initiative and judgement.

Evidence confirms a direct relationship between registered nurse staffing levels and positive patient outcomes (mortality and adverse events, patient experience, quality of care and the efficiency of care delivery). Thus, there is an economic as well as a qualitative incentive in creating an optimal skill mix.

Society requires that nurses and the healthcare teams that they work within provide healthcare of high quality. Nurses deliver 24 hour services, in contrast to most other professions. It is expected that nurses coordinate healthcare from a patient perspective and therefore have the opportunity to act as a patient advocate in healthcare situations.

As stated in the Munich Declaration, following the second WHO Ministerial Conference on Nursing and Midwifery in Europe in 2000, nurses deliver a substantial contribution to the increase of effective healthcare. Based on their knowledge and experience, nurses assess care needs, provide and deliver care, at the same time considering the cost and labour effectiveness.

In many Western European countries nurses have established successful non hospital treatment centres for non-communicable diseases and are in the forefront in terms of delivering care in new settings and closer to patients' homes.

Patient centred nursing care has contributed to positive patient outcomes due to:

- A holistic and integrated approach towards management of patient care;
- An increase of the ability of nurses to identify deterioration in a patient's condition early and instigate appropriate interventions (the opposite of failure to rescue);
- Increased systematic and continuous patient support;

- To optimise patient care a number of topics must be addressed. This can be achieved by further developing the role and skills of nurses to match their competencies and already attained functions. Advanced Nursing Practice/Nurse Practitioners have a key role to play in the health system reform. The EFN would call on all member states to take forward the following principles and policies in shaping the existing and future nursing workforce;
- Legislation and regulatory arrangements in most European countries must be adapted towards the new forms of healthcare delivery. The position and responsibilities of nurses in relation to other professionals in healthcare must be clearly defined, as part of effective multidisciplinary team working;
- There must be a clear definition of the role and skills requirements of healthcare assistants and auxiliaries including a clear articulation of the relationship between these groups and the registered nursing workforce (DIR 36/2005/EC) within each country;
- Every national government must define and support together with the professionals involved, the conditions and culture change required under which the new roles and responsibilities and innovation in care delivery can develop. Governments should support the good models for practice already acquired in some European countries and use of the EU funds and international cooperation to implement new skill mixes/task shifting;
- To optimise patient care, tasks and responsibility must be defined and allocated to the healthcare groups in accordance with their educational qualifications and competencies - without compromising the quality of care;
- In order to avoid nursing shortage governments must therefore initiate strong human resource strategies and workforce planning. This should be aligned to horizon scanning of the EU healthcare workforce, with particular reference to the EU Healthcare Workforce Action plan. Global workforce challenges should also be considered within Government decisions;
- There must be significant investment in nursing education to ensure appropriate education, lifelong learning and continuous professional development to support nursing and nurses so that healthcare professionals can attain the high level qualifications and competencies that meet the changing needs of healthcare;
- An established pattern of career pathways, including clinical, academic and research pathways and an extended career ladder are conditional to a successful introduction of new skills and the implementation of skills mix;
- In-Service Education is very useful and necessary in the clinical area. The contribution of well organised and formally established In-Service Education departments is of vital importance. Involving suitable and competent health professionals will contribute much in the efforts for the development of knowledge and improvement of skills of nurses;
- Extension and expansion of responsibilities or any transfer of skills should be accompanied by appropriate remuneration to all professional groups involved;
- Change in skills mix must not lead to an increase in the administrative workload of nurses;
- Skill mix decisions should be country-specific and take account of local service delivery needs, quality and effectiveness factors, efficiency, the current configuration of health services and available resources, as well as production and training, and include all the health professions in decision-making;
- Robust and effective nursing leadership is vital in achieving the goals set out in this Position Statement.

References:

- [Aiken et al. Patient safety, satisfaction, and quality of hospital care: cross sectional surveys of nurses and patients in 12 countries in Europe and the United States. British Medical Journal](#)
- [RN4CAST "Nurse Forecasting in Europe" Project](#)

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