



EFN POSITION PAPER ON PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH CARE ASSISTANTS (HCAS)

The education and development of healthcare assistants (HCAs) is an increasingly important issue for patient care across Europe. Healthcare systems are relying more and more on HCAs carrying out an ever increasing number of duties, due to more pressure on health budgets and increased task shifting. Nurses play a crucial role in the supervision of HCAs and ensure an effective line of accountability between the registered nurse and the HCA. As the representative voice of nurses across Europe, it is important for the EFN to set out its position in relation to the development of HCAs in the future, further to our work on developing three nursing categories which this work has important links to.

The central and unique role of nurses and nursing remains crucial to safe and effective care. Nurses have a primary role in the provision of care and Governments must continue to support this primary role by providing more nurse education and more nurses.

HCAs are not nurses and cannot replace the care that nurses currently provide, but they do have constant contact with patients. For this reason, it is crucial the division between the role of nurses and the role of HCAs is clearly defined.

Across the EU and Europe there are very different approaches to the role, regulation and employment of HCAs. The recent EU study, *'Development and Coordination of a Network of Nurse Educators and Regulators'* which sought to map approaches to healthcare assistants across the EU, clearly demonstrated these vast differences. In some EU Member States there is statutory training for HCAs underpinned by regulation, others have a distinct difference between the type of roles supporting registered nurses ranging from licensed practical nurses to regulated HCAs (often in the care home sector), and in others still, there is no formal requirement for training and HCAs are expected to carry out practical clinical and healthcare activities with very little training.

Due to these differences in the regulation of HCAs, the EFN calls for a new EU approach. Due to the fact that the regulatory environments and the expectations on the role of HCAs vary widely among the Member States, the development of a EU common training platform is unlikely to become a mechanism for mutual recognition. Rather than focusing on a common EU education and training platform for HCAs, the EFN believes that EU activity will be better placed in focusing on the common challenges to the development of HCAs in each member state. EFN would instead emphasise that future EU work should focus on taking forward some core principles which would underpin the development of HCAs in individual Member States and ensure the right system architecture is in place across the EU for regulation. It is necessary to develop a framework underpinning the training and development of HCAs **in each Member State**, as this is not the case in all countries.

To enable the effective development of HCAs in the future, EFN calls on the Commission and Member States to support the following principles:

- **A clear articulation of the line of accountability between a registered nurse and a health care assistant.**

Registered nurses have primary accountability for the overall nursing care of their patients and this accountability is not transferrable. They are accountable for their decisions to delegate activities to others including HCAs and must ensure that the person to whom they delegate has appropriate knowledge and skills, understands their instructions and is adequately supervised and supported to provide safe and compassionate care. Whilst not accountable for the decisions and actions of the person to whom they have delegated the activity, registered nurses must confirm that any delegated activity meets the required standard. Registered nurses must be supported by management should they have concerns about the conduct or competence of the HCA they are supervising.

- **A commitment to comprehensive and consistent frameworks to ensure HCAs can deliver safe and effective care and to ensure public protection in each Member State.**

In the context of the HCA always reporting to and being supervised by a Registered Nurse, EFN calls on all Member States to have a comprehensive framework to ensure HCAs can deliver safe and effective care. This must be underpinned by a clear and consistent structures if concerns are raised about performance or conduct to ensure public protection, and assurance for receivers of care and organisations delivering care.

- **A robust quality assurance system for all HCA programmes carried out in individual Member States**

The nature and quality of HCA programmes varies across Europe, particularly for those programmes which have no statutory underpinning. EFN calls for consistent standards of education and training in each member state for HCAs, to provide confidence to patients and assurance to nurses that any HCA has a core level of knowledge and skills that will be applicable in all care settings. The level of HCA educational programmes are distinct and separate from the education and training required to become a registered nurse.

- **A commitment to continuing education and training for all HCAs**

HCAs will often receive formal education and training at the start of their career. The nature of what an HCA is expected to undertake and the skills and knowledge required will alter as care continues to change. It is therefore vital that if HCAs are to remain an important part of the health workforce then there must be a commitment by all Governments to update their learning and development throughout their career. This commitment must stand alongside the need for the continuing professional development of nurses in each member state, which must also be enhanced

- **Exchange and facilitation of best practices at EU level**

EFN members have many good examples of effective training and development of HCAs and of best practise working relationships between nurses and HCAs. EFN calls on the Commission to facilitate the exchange of best practice in relation to HCA development throughout the EU.

EFN Position Paper – October 2015

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)

Registration Number 476.356.013

Clos du Parnasse 11A, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 512 74 19 Fax: +32 2 512 35 50

Email: efn@efn.be Website: www.efnweb.eu