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April 5, 2013

By email:
hsmith@una.ab.ca

Heather Smith
President
United Nurses of Alberta
700-11150 Jasper Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 0L1

Dear Heather:

Re: Registered Nurses Profession Regulation

The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) is currently working with Alberta Health to revise the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* based upon Provincial Council policy decisions.

I can appreciate you likely have a number of competing priorities, however, your feedback is important to me and will allow for additional perspectives related to this proposed change to the CARNA regulation. The purpose of the discussion paper is to identify issues related to the supervision of graduate nurses (GN) specifically:

- define who graduate nurses are,
- provide a brief overview of the literature with respect to transition to practice,
- identify initiatives that have been developed to address transition issues,
- present CARNA's experience and decision from a regulatory perspective,
- identify the emergence of a new issue related to transition to practice, and
- present CARNA's proposal to support graduate nurses and graduate nurse practitioners in the transition to practice.

Please accept my thanks in advance for your feedback – we look forward to hearing from you by Thursday, April 25, 2013.

Sincerely,

Mary-Anne Robinson RN, BN, MSA
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment: Appendix A – Discussion Paper

Appendix A

SUPERVISION OF GRADUATE NURSES

The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) is currently working with Alberta Health to revise the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* based upon Provincial Council policy decisions. The purpose of this brief discussion paper is to identify issues related to the supervision of graduate nurses (GN) and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on a proposed change to the CARNA regulation with respect to this issue. This discussion paper will:

- define who graduate nurses are,
- provide a brief overview of the literature with respect to transition to practice,
- identify initiatives that have been developed to address transition issues,
- present CARNA's experience and decision from a regulatory perspective,
- identify the emergence of a new issue related to transition to practice and
- present CARNA's proposal to support graduate nurses in their transition to practice.

Who Are Graduate Nurses?

A GN with temporary registration is either a graduate of an approved or recognized entry level nursing education program or an applicant to CARNA who is deemed to possess substantial equivalence, such as an Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN). Temporary registrants are eligible to be issued a temporary permit that allows them to be employed while they meet the remaining requirements for full RN registration, which may include writing and passing the registration exam and the submission of a satisfactory reference from a current Alberta employer.

Literature Review

The transition to practice for new graduates was first described by Marlene Kramer in her book *Reality Shock: Why Nurses Leave Nursing* (1974). Since then there has been ongoing discussion of this issue in the literature and in practice settings. Benner (1984) described five phases in the transition to practice including novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert practitioner.

Duchscher (2012) stated that it takes time and experience to become a proficient practitioner. Reduction in the number of beds and length of stay has resulted in an increased acuity in acute care facilities. In addition, there is an increase in the technology and knowledge needed to support care of the acutely ill patient. This has resulted in a need for increased skills and autonomy of the proficient nurse. Employers want graduates that can "hit the ground running" (Ellerton & Gregor, 2003, p. 104).

It is very different for the new graduate to be in the practice setting with all of the responsibility, accountability and role expectations of a professional nurse. It is unrealistic for nursing education programs to be able to fully prepare a new graduate for the variety and breadth of clinical practice situations and responsibility that new practitioners are likely to face. From the employer perspective, few employment settings can provide all of the ideal supports that assist new graduates in their transition to practice. There is a shortage of resources, both human and financial, along with high expectations for change and service demands in employer facilities and programs.

Graduate nurses who are IENs also experience a complex transition to practice in a new country. A transition phase for IENs is necessary for safe and effective care of patients (Xu, 2010), to ensure proficiency of the working language, identify gaps in nursing education, learn about differences in health care systems, nursing practice and culture (Xu & He, 2012). IENs often have to adapt their clinical practice and communication styles to that of the new environment in which they work. This may be due, but not limited to, differences in technology, language, pain management, assessments and procedures, and medication administration (Adeniran et al, 2008). Although Adeniran et al found that IENs are more likely to be hired for frontline patient care in acute practice settings, in Alberta, IENs are frequently employed in long term care while graduate nurses. Regardless of the practice setting, their successful transition is important for the sake of patient and public safety (Adeniran et al, 2008).

Various studies have demonstrated that IENs do not feel comfortable and competent until at least 12 months in their new environment. Xu (2010) states transition programs should include instruction of language and communication skills, interpersonal skills and dynamics, agency policies and procedures, nursing and health care systems in comparative perspectives, and comparison of culture based values and beliefs. There should also be a clinical component, where practice is supervised through modeling, coaching, and mentoring.

Initiatives to Address Transition Issues

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) is a council comprised of the state regulatory boards for registered nurses in the US. NCSBN (2013) has been concerned about patient safety and the transition to practice (<https://www.ncsbn.org/363.htm#why>). They have developed an evidence based Transition to Practice Model and are now conducting a longitudinal, multi-institutional randomized study to investigate the effect of their model on patient safety and quality outcomes. It is anticipated that the results of the study will be presented to the NCSBN Annual Meeting in 2014.

In Alberta the Clinical and Nursing Practice Leaders Network (CLNPN) and the Alberta Nursing Education Administrators (ANEA) undertook a project to identify strategies that would promote successful transition of entry level nurses from Alberta programs (RNs LPNs and RPNs) with funding from Alberta Health. A number of recommendations were made to address transition issues. Traditionally, transition for IEN GNs has been more commonly addressed through the site where they are employed.

CARNA perspective

Since the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* under the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) was first drafted, there have been significant changes to the health system and the nursing workforce in Alberta which impact the experience of the newly graduated GNs as well as IENs entering practice for the first time. Increasing workforce changes as well as a significant growth in the number of IEN applicants have tested CARNA's ability to uphold its mandate to ensure public safety within the current regulations. Service delivery restructuring, new roles and practice settings for RNs, skill mix changes, workforce shortages, technology advances and increased acuity and complexity are some of the factors currently impacting the nursing workforce in Alberta. In addition, practice supports are frequently insufficient or not available in health care settings in Alberta. This is the reality of the environment in which the temporary registrant is beginning work, whether as a new graduate or an IEN.

The CARNA Interpretive Document, *The Graduate Nurse: Scope of practice* (2009), describes considerations for GNs, RNs, employers and others to assist in understanding the scope of practice of a graduate nurse. Specifically, it states:

A graduate nurse on a temporary register is authorized to perform all the restricted activities and other interventions a registered nurse can perform if the graduate nurse is competent to perform the intervention and it is relevant to the practice setting. Supervision of a graduate nurse's practice is not required in legislation. Graduate nurses are entry-level practitioners and their level of practice autonomy and proficiency develops best with collaboration, mentoring and support from registered nurse colleagues, managers and other health-care team members. A graduate nurse on the temporary register should not be assigned as the nurse in charge or left alone in a practice setting as the only nurse unless they have the necessary clinical experience and competencies to take on this role and responsibility. (CARNA's Position, para. 1)

Despite the guidance and direction provided by CARNA on this matter, it is frequently observed that graduate nurses are regularly placed in charge, left alone in the practice setting, take employment in settings where there are no other registered nurses or required to supervise students, other graduate nurses or other health care providers. Coupled with a complex and rapidly changing health system, new entrants to the RN profession in Alberta are significantly challenged to consolidate their knowledge and develop the necessary skill and ability to practice independently as an RN. CARNA's regulatory mandate does not extend to the ability to directly influence the nature and structure of the work settings in which registrants practice.

Given the current health care context, with few changes anticipated in the foreseeable future, the Registrar and Registration Committee proposed a change to the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* pertaining to temporary registration to require supervision of all individuals on the temporary register, for the duration of their temporary practice permit. The nature of the supervision would be direct, indirect or indirect remote as applicable. Adding a supervision requirement, which

would be manifested as a condition on the temporary permit issued to the graduate nurse, would make explicit CARNA's expectation that an appropriate level of supervision be provided to these individuals who have not yet achieved full registration.

Registration Committee would develop policy to set the parameters for assessing and ensuring that an appropriate level of supervision will be maintained which is satisfactory to the Registrar or Registration Committee. This proposal for the change to the CARNA regulation was approved by Provincial Council at their May 2011 meeting and is being incorporated into the draft changes to the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* that CARNA is working on with Alberta Health.

Emerging Issue Related to Supervision of Graduate Nurses

CARNA Provincial Council passed a motion in May of 2012 to approve the signing of a contract with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) for development of a new RN entry-to-practice exam for use in Alberta beginning in 2015. Currently there are three writings of the registration exam a year. Most graduates of entry level nursing education programs complete their program, apply for a temporary permit so that they can begin employment shortly after graduation and write the registration exam at the next available writing. The exam results take several weeks to come back so frequently the new graduate is on the temporary register for about 3 or 4 months. IENs are required to have a reference from an Alberta employer based on 225 hours of satisfactory nursing practice so their time on the temporary register can vary but it would be approximately an equivalent period of time.

When the new NCLEX exam is implemented the process from written exam to RN registration can take less than 3 weeks rather than the current 3-4 months or longer. An applicant will be able to write the registration exam at any time rather than three times a year, with results available shortly thereafter. At that point, the new graduate is considered eligible for full RN registration. The decision of Provincial Council to require supervision during the time a graduate nurse is on the temporary register was based on the current model where it would take 3-4 months for the applicant to progress to full licensure.

At this point, it is anticipated these shortened timelines for progress to full registration will apply only to GNs. There is no change planned to how the nurse practitioner entry to practice exam is administered, nor when results are made available beyond the current four to seven weeks processing time. Graduate nurse practitioners will be required to be supervised while they are on the temporary register.

CARNA Proposal to Support Graduates Nurses in their Practice

As noted above the transition to practice is an issue for both new graduates and IENs. Some employment settings have initiated transition programs and provide extended orientation but it does take time for the transition to occur. Duchscher (2012) describes three transition stages for new graduates: doing (3-4 months), being (4-8 months) and knowing (9-12 months).

With the change in administration of the entry to practice exam, the new graduate and the IEN could be placed in a situation where they are fully registered as an RN without completing a period of time as a GN under supervision that enhances the safe transition to RN responsibility and accountability. A transition program in their workplace, if it exists, may be their only support as there is likely to be pressure to function as a fully registered nurse. Patient and public safety is at risk when GNs are not provided appropriate support through the transition stages. In consideration of CARNA's regulatory role, patient safety, risk management and the importance of supporting the graduate nurse in their transition to practice CARNA puts forward the following proposal:

The *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* be amended to require all new graduates and IENs applying to CARNA for licensure as a registered nurse be required, at a minimum, to be on the temporary register under supervision for the equivalent of 4 months of full time employment and provide a satisfactory reference before being able to apply for full registration and licensure as a registered nurse.

Feedback to the Proposal

CARNA would appreciate feedback on the above proposal by answering the following questions:

1. What are the implications of this proposal for your practice setting from a patient safety perspective?
2. Do you support this proposal in assisting the graduate nurse to make the transition to practice? Why or why not?
3. Does the 4 months seem like a reasonable time period for the graduate nurse to be under supervision?
4. Do you have other suggestions or comments related to this issue and CARNA's proposal to support safe practice?
5. What benefits do you anticipate by implementing this sort of proposal? What challenges might be encountered?