

Nursing work experience programs should be supported by the following principles:

- Nurses within the health facility share a positive view of the value and relevance of nursing work experience and recognise that it is a long term recruitment strategy.
- Resources, personnel and financial, are committed to enabling the implementation of a suitable program.
- Safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of all matters associated with patients, staff and health service business while not compromising the services being delivered, are key concerns for the health care system throughout the nursing work experience program.
- The organisation of a nursing work experience program should occur in consultation with nurses at all levels in the health facility and should be accompanied by comprehensive instruction and orientation.
- Sensitivity to the cultural and traditional values of some students may require the adaptation of the program.
- Nurses are welcoming and motivated to promote an experience that is positive and meaningful for the student.
- School students on nursing work experience are to participate in nursing work under the supervision of a nurse. Examples of suitable activities are listed on page 14 as well as in the student handbook.
- The degree of student involvement in nursing activities is dependent on patient consent, support of a qualified nurse and professional judgement.
- Work experience is voluntary and there is no expectation of monetary reward.⁸
- Students on work experience are not to be used as a substitute for staff.
- The program should be evaluated .

Insurance and indemnity

Work experience that is approved and organised by State schools has insurance and indemnity provisions which cover employers, students and teachers.⁹

While provisions are similar for students attending Catholic and Independent schools, the policies vary. In all cases, details of the insurance cover are to be sighted by the participating health care facility prior to any placement commencing. AHS's may consider developing a policy to streamline placement arrangements.

NOTE: Where work experience is arranged privately between students, parents and employers, the above provisions do not apply.

Patient confidentiality

Student access to patients remains at the discretion of the supervising nurse. Patients' rights must always be respected.

Care must be taken to protect the privacy of patients and staff by treating all matters in the utmost confidence.

Health facilities are encouraged to use a Protection of Privileged and Confidential Information form and/or the *Nursing Work Experience - Conditions of Participation* leaflet (page 30) as a way of raising awareness among students and parents of this matter. The importance of patient confidentiality should be highlighted and thoroughly covered in Orientation.

Criminal record checks

Criminal Record Checks are not required for school students undertaking work experience.^{10 11}

Occupational health and safety

The participating health care facility is responsible for providing an environment that is free from harassment and health and physical safety risks.

Rules & responsibilities

The rules and responsibilities of all parties to work experience are clearly stated in the various guides developed by the Department of Education and Training.

Students are briefed at school about their responsibilities while on work experience. This needs to be reinforced during orientation. See page 30 for a sample information leaflet for students that outlines both general and specific principles of nursing work experience.

SCHOOL OBLIGATIONS

The school is obliged to select students whose primary interest is nursing or, alternatively, a health related occupation, to prepare students for placement and to provide the necessary information to satisfy the placement requirements of the health service.

STUDENT OBLIGATIONS

Students are required to understand and accept the rules and objectives associated with work experience and respect the rules and policies of the host employer.

1. PLANNING

Prepare a nursing work experience program

Prepare a NWEF based on the AHS's work experience policy and documents from the Department of Education and Training and Workcover NSW.

Program design considerations

The overall aim is to design and introduce a structured, comprehensive, clearly defined, diverse, interactive, enjoyable and practical program for school students that is supported and supervised by nurses.

Other professional groups within a health facility may conduct work experience programs. There are benefits to be gained in liaising with key people in these groups and with staff in human resources who are often the first point of contact for the student in a health facility.

Engage the nurses

Engage the nursing staff by informing key nurses such as Nursing Unit Managers about the initiative and the reasons for its introduction or review. It is important to elicit their ideas for the program content and commitment to offer a student placement.

The attitude of nurses working in the clinical areas is pivotal to the success of a NWEF. Enthusiastic and motivated nurses who embrace the concept of work experience will be a valuable asset to a health facility introducing nursing work experience or expanding an existing program, as they will influence the student's impression about nursing. It is for this

reason that they need to be positive and enthusiastic in their outlook and willing participants in nursing work experience.

Identify suitable clinical areas

Consider all areas, in which nurses work, as possible placement locations.

Determine the format for nursing work experience

Possible options include:

- The student stays in one clinical area
- The student rotates through several clinical areas
- The student rotates through different sites, for example hospital ward and community service or public and private hospital.

If a student expresses interest in nursing but also in other health professions the following options can be considered:

- The student rotates through several different departments, looking at several occupations, one of which is nursing
- All students rotate through several different departments for one or two days at a time, one day is spent in nursing.

Plan student activities

Students on nursing work experience are there to be actively involved in nursing work at the discretion of the supervising nurse. It is of little value to the student if they are only permitted to observe. From the students' perspective, the more they see and do the better the experience and the more likely they are to give nursing serious consideration.

Activities that the student can **participate** in:

- Practising the correct handwashing technique
- Making beds to hospital standards
- Feeling pulse rates
- Listening to heart sounds during blood pressure recording
- Helping feed a patient
- Reading a thermometer
- Assisting a patient with their personal hygiene
- Assisting with escorting a patient to another department
- Joining in diversional activities
- Attending an inservice education session
- Helping restock supplies
- Helping check and test equipment

And any other activity deemed suitable for the student to participate in.

Students may **observe**:

- Wound dressings
- Giving and recording the administration of medications
- Drawing up and giving an injection
- Care of the mouth and teeth
- Pressure area care
- Documenting nursing care
- Recording observations
- Cleaning, checking and restocking of the emergency trolley
- Setting up intravenous therapy
- Inserting a naso gastric tube
- Repositioning patients in bed

And any other activity deemed suitable for the student to observe.

Students may be **demonstrated** the following techniques:

- Techniques used to prevent cross infection
- Correct handwashing techniques
- Feeding a patient
- Patient transfer techniques
- Correct use of walking aids
- Communicating with patients who have speech problems
- Weighing patients
- Specimen testing
- Oxygen and nebulisation therapy

And any other activity deemed appropriate for the student to be shown.

Determine the number of student places

Start small to test the manageability of the program. Usually one or two students can be placed in the same location.

Identify when to offer nursing work experience

Schools vary in their organisation of work experience therefore requests can be received from February to December. It is for the health facility to identify when and to what extent it is able to participate in nursing work experience.

Examine the health facility's activity patterns and school terms to determine the most suitable months of the year to host students. Build in some flexibility to cater for unexpected requests.

A timetable can be a helpful tool to illustrate the location and dates of the program over the year.

Plan orientation

Student orientation is an important part of the NWEF. It sets the tone of the whole experience and provides an opportunity for the Program Coordinator to meet and welcome the students (further details can be found on page 34). The aim of orientation is to:

- talk about the responsibilities of the health facility
- discuss the expectations of the student and health facility in relation to the program
- remind students about their obligations as representatives of a school and guests of the health facility
- explain both the practical and formal aspects of the program, including components such as assessment and evaluation
- introduce students to information about nursing and show the nursing video
- provide students with a set of resources to use on placement and to keep as a record of their experience (see page 33).

Prepare correspondence and forms

The sample letters, forms and memos (pages 36, 37 and 38) can be used or adapted. It is useful to have these items prepared in advance of receiving the requests.

Set up a database

Details of requests and nursing work experience placements should be captured on a database. The establishment of a database will make it easier when issuing follow-up correspondence to students and schools.

The data will be valuable for reporting purposes (see page 44 for a sample Activity Summary)

RESOURCES TO ENHANCE THE STUDENT'S PLACEMENT

- Nursing Career Kits, Nursing Specialty booklets and Nursing video.
- Workcover Authority and Labor Council leaflets on workplace safety.^{12 13}
- *Dare to Care – the Challenge of Nursing Work Experience – A handbook for School Students.*
- Items that could make up the Student Survival Kit (see page 33 for details).
- Health facility brochures and maps and other promotional material if available.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Develop marketing and communication strategies

Marketing and communication strategies are required to ensure that students are aware of the program and know when to apply for places in the program. Communication strategies inform participating staff of the activity and alert the health facility to the presence of school students.

The Area Facilitator is ideally placed to manage the overall marketing and communication strategies listed in the next three steps.

Notify local schools of the nursing work experience opportunities

Communication strategies may include:

- Posting opportunities for school students on the AHS, health facility or school website
- Including NWEF information in the health facility's promotional literature
- Conducting lunchtime career talks at schools and making direct contact with potential work experience students.

Network with school careers advisers

The career adviser in each local school organises student work experience placements in industry and are a useful contact.

Advise them:

- of nursing work experience opportunities available at their closest health facility
- when work experience is available
- of the number of places available
- of the application process.

An efficient way of targeting several schools is to conduct a nursing presentation for a group of careers

advisers from several local schools. This is also an opportunity for careers advisers to meet nurses and be given information about the nursing profession.

Inform health facility staff

It is beneficial to inform all employees that a NWEF is being conducted.

Communication strategies could include:

- Advertise the NWEF in the AHS monthly newsletter to inform and promote the program to all staff
- A presentation to the Area nursing executive
- A session by the nursing work experience coordinator during staff orientation
- Publication of articles in local newsletters
- An information sheet or in-service presentation to Nursing Unit Managers explaining the use of this Guide and describing the local plans in more detail.

PROCESSING REQUESTS FOR NURSING WORK EXPERIENCE

Sources of requests

Requests for nursing work experience placements can be received from:

- individual students and their parents or guardians
- school careers advisers
- coordinators of work experience collectives such as Compacts.

Out of Area requests

Requests received from outside the geographical area covered by the AHS can be redirected to the appropriate AHS.

Interstate requests

Any interstate students should be advised to contact the NSW Department of Education and Training for information and an application form for work experience in NSW.

The interstate student will be asked to justify their request to the satisfaction of the Department of Education and Training before insurance cover will be provided. Once approved, the placement can be arranged in the usual way.

Requests from non-school students

Requests may also be received from people who have left school and who may or may not be undertaking formal study at an educational institution. While it is equally important to promote nursing to this group, they do not have access to the same insurance cover as students. They can be offered alternatives to work experience such as those outlined on page 27.

Determine eligibility for work experience participation

Before placing a student in a NWE, the following criteria must be met:

- The student must be 14 years of age or over and currently attending Year 9, 10, 11 or 12 at school. Students must be over 15 to attend the workplace outside the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm¹⁴
- The request is made as part of the school's formal workplace learning program
- Insurance and indemnity provisions are in place and the school provides a copy of the policy details to the program coordinator
- The student has an interest in nursing and/or other health industry occupations
- Parental approval is given
- The placement details requested by the student, namely dates and times, can be accommodated by the health facility.

Requests received by telephone are best handled by requesting the student to document required information in letter format.

If the student requests work experience in a career other than nursing, the request can be referred to other departments or to human resources. Alternatively, they can be included in a rotational program.

Priority may be given to students from local schools according to postcode, referring others to another health facility or AHS. If a request cannot be accommodated, a letter of refusal needs to be promptly sent to the student or the school. Alternatives to work experience should be included in the letter.

Confirm placement

Students need to receive confirmation of the work experience placement as soon as possible and it is advisable to send a copy of the letter to the school careers adviser.

The confirmation letter needs to provide information to both students and parents. Include details such as:

- where to go on the first day
- what to wear
- who to meet
- what to bring on the first day.

Ensure that the necessary *Nursing Work Experience - Conditions of Participation* leaflet and/or the Protection of Privileged and Confidential Information form is included with the confirmation letter for them to complete (see pages 30, 37 and 39).

Notify the relevant Nursing Unit Manager of anticipated nursing work experience placements.

Examples of form letters that can be used to obtain more information or to approve and confirm a placement are provided on pages 36, 37 and 39.

Obtain all necessary information

The following information needs to be collected from the student before starting the NWEF:

- A copy of the school's policy on the insurance and indemnity provisions
- A completed Nursing Work Experience - Conditions of Participation leaflet and a signed Protection of Privileged and Confidential Information form (see page 30 and 39) – usually issued with the letter of confirmation page 37.
- Student Assessment form provided by the school.

WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM FEATURES

Orientation

A suggested format for orientation can be found on page 34. Key features include:

- An outline of the purpose and expected outcomes of nursing work experience for all parties and an overview of what activities they will be able to perform or observe
- An explanation of the AHS's commitment and responsibilities to nursing work experience
- Clarification of the student's responsibilities in regard to their attendance and behaviour
- Specific information on safety, confidentiality and patient care issues
- The steps to follow in unforeseen circumstances
- The placement plan and contact people

Orientation is an appropriate time to issue the Student Survival Kit and discuss the contents (see page 33).

Orientation can conclude with a brief discussion about nursing, the showing of the nursing video and a tour of the health facility and discussion of the services provided.

Introductions

At the conclusion of the tour the Program Coordinator should take the student to the area to which they have been assigned and introduce them to their supervising nurse.

Making work experience meaningful to the student

Providing a meaningful experience ensures that the student can make an informed decision about the suitability of a nursing career. Suggestions include:

- If feasible, meet with students and their parents, to prepare them for the forthcoming work experience. If possible, offer a facility tour
- Provide a welcoming environment and a warm, friendly atmosphere for the student by selecting placement areas that are receptive to hosting school students
- Recruit nurses to supervise students who are good role models, committed to promoting a positive image of nursing and keen to participate in work experience. Encourage them to help the students do and see as much as possible
- Be aware of the student's limited life experience. Choose activities that are appropriate for both the student and the patient. Ask the patient's permission and prepare the student for what they may see and how to respond
- Advise supervising nurses to give an explanation for each procedure so that the student learns to appreciate the depth of knowledge required to be a nurse
- Make sure students are aware of situations which may limit the time nurses can spend with them. Ensure that they are occupied at these times eg. completing activities in the handbook
- Organise regular times to meet the students during the placement to find out how they are going and debrief if necessary
- Provide students with promotional items (if available) as tokens of the experience.

School liaison during nursing work experience

During the period of work experience there is usually at least one visit by a school staff member. This provides an opportunity for the teachers to meet the nurses and discuss the program and the student's performance in the workplace.

Troubleshooting

Occasionally it may be necessary to intervene or resolve a problem that involves the student. The following points may assist:

- Students are not under contract to the health facility and therefore their placement can be terminated at any time
- If the student has an unforeseen need to leave the health facility, the careers adviser or the school must be notified for advice on the procedure to be followed
- If a student complains about their work experience placement in a particular setting, it is advisable, for the Program Coordinator to discuss the matter with the Nursing Unit Manager.

EVALUATION

See page 41 for a sample of evaluation tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the work experience program.

Assessment of student performance

The school is required to obtain a formal assessment of the student's performance.

The assessment form is provided by the school and can be completed by the supervising nurses or the health facility coordinator in consultation with the nurses. On completion, it is usually discussed with the student and then forwarded to the school. The assessment becomes part of the student's school record.

Meet and debrief with students

It is important to conduct a debriefing with the student on the final day of the program in order to:

- determine how the student found their experience, their views on nursing, both positive and negative and their plans for the future. The student handbook can be a helpful resource to refer to at this stage
- offer guidance and suggestions on how to pursue a nursing career and direct them to other sources for further information
- provide feedback to the student on their performance and discuss their assessment
- elicit the student's comments on the program and ideas on how it could be improved
- provide an opportunity for the student to ask any further questions
- present the student with the work experience certificate.

Program evaluation by student

Student feedback on the NWEF provides valuable information that can be used when reviewing the program. See page 41 for sample evaluation forms.

Student handbook evaluation

The student handbook aims to stimulate further interest into nursing while the student is on work experience. Feedback on its usefulness by the student is of particular interest and outcomes should be reported. A sample evaluation tool is included on page 42.

Program evaluation by nurses

Assessment of nursing work experience through formal discussion with the nurses who supervise students, will ensure support and provide the opportunity for nurses to:

- have input into the program
- ensure their needs are met
- resolve any issues associated with the program
- set realistic annual targets for the program.

Monitoring and evaluation

Other sources include:

- Development of a profile of students who have participated in the NWEF from information contained on the database.
- Activity Summary Sheets which quantify the number of students participating in NWEF for the AHS (see sample form page 44).
- Adapting Activity Summaries to form an Area-wide report of work experience activity. When used in conjunction with a business plan, the outcomes can be measured against projected targets (see page 45).

This information on a state-wide basis can be used to identify trends associated with nursing work experience as a recruitment strategy.

Nursing research

Nursing research suggests there is a correlation between positive workplace experiences and interest in nursing careers.^{1 2 3 5}

However, there is no formal mechanism in the education system that looks at subject choices and career decisions following work experience.

The collection of data associated with nursing work experience is particularly suited to longitudinal research and could be a source of research topics for nurses who are studying or who wish to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

Information gathered from the following sources, although general in nature, may prove to be a useful indicator of the long term outcomes of nursing work experience:

- The Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs (DETYA) collects statistics on enrolments to the Bachelor of Nursing courses in NSW, according to the residential postcodes of students.
- NSW New Graduate Nurse Recruitment Consortium evaluation forms (since 1998) which contain a question on nursing work experience. It may also assist if a similar question could be asked of applicants to Enrolled Nurse courses.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Feedback to nurses

Acknowledge the contribution made by nurses to the NWEF. Provide nurses with any constructive feedback received from the students.

Follow-up school careers advisers

At appropriate intervals throughout the year, make contact with the school careers advisers to determine the impact of nursing work experience on the student and its effect on career choices.

Track former nursing work experience students

Some schools survey former students. Schools may be willing to share feedback from students in relation to career choice and courses being undertaken. Information in relation to students who participated in nursing work experience may be valuable in determining the impact of work experience.

Promote the success of nursing work experience

Recording work experience success stories is an excellent form of public relations and may encourage other departments to participate.

Suggestions include:

- Write an article for the local newsletter or magazine or a nursing journal and send copies to the local schools. Include photographs of the students
Note: Prior permission from students and their parents is required to publish their photographs
- Write an article for a school magazine, a publication for parents or the local newspaper featuring a particular school or student
- Collect testimonials from students at the end of their placement and compile an article or visual display for posting in the health facility
- Display any thank you cards received from students.

CHECKLIST

