

# Retaining Registered Nurses Beyond the First Graduate Year

## Thriving or Surviving their First Year and the Value of a Group Clinical Supervision Program

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## Background

Future projections towards 2030 warn of an Australian Nursing workforce shortage (Department of Health, 2014). Poor retention rates are implicated as a contributing factor. This is compounded by a dissatisfaction with nursing and the destabilisation of nursing as a career choice beyond the first post graduate year (Health workforce Australia, 2014).

The quality of professional support during the first graduate year may directly influence the Registered Nurses decision to remain in the profession. It appears that a predominant issue confronting graduate nurses is the availability of professional and personal support during the first year of employment. Organisational support has been identified in the literature as a common feature impacting on Australian graduate nurses' transition into the workforce (Walker, Costa, Foster & de Bruin, 2017). So the question arises, are nurses effectively supported during the first graduate year and are they thriving or merely surviving into their professional future?

In 2015 a Clinical Supervision Monthly Drop-In program was established at Gosford and Wyong Hospital for Transition to Professional Practice (TPP) Nurses within Central Coast Local Health District (CCLHD). Clinical Supervision allows protected time for facilitated, in-depth reflection of clinical practice focusing on support and development (ACSA, 2015). The program has been rated highly by participants and prompted the researchers to explore efficacy of professional support interventions within the first year of nursing.

## Aims

This research aims to enrich the existing body of related research by seeking to understand what sustains newly registered nurses in their first year of employment, and what factors enable them to stay in nursing allowing them to thrive as opposed to just survive. Data will be used locally to support ongoing clinical supervision programs and repurpose existing programs with new educational approaches.

## Method

Both quantitative and qualitative data has been obtained utilising survey method to explore the efficacy of clinical supervision and whether nurses are thriving or simply surviving the early years of nursing. Specifically, whether group clinical supervision is a useful professional support strategy to promote and develop resilient professional behaviours, clinical confidence and competence, supporting nurses to remain in the profession beyond the first year.

All 2018 new graduate nurses (110) were invited to participate in group clinical supervision and to complete a specifically designed evaluation survey. All nurses who did or did not attend group clinical supervision were invited to complete the 'Thriving or Surviving in the Nursing Workforce Survey' at three stages during their first graduate year (1 month, 4 months and 10 months).

Quantitative data was entered into an excel spreadsheet and exported to SPSS for descriptive statistical analysis. Thematic analysis has commenced utilising an in-depth, rigorous twelve-step *trustworthiness* process (Nowell et al., 2017)

## Meet the Team



Top Left: Dr Jennie King (Support person) Dr Robyn Rosina (Researcher & Mentor)  
Lead Researchers: Rachel O'Neill and Janet Chesworth  
Bottom Left: Assistant Researchers: Catherine Lothian, Sonya Ryan and Lisa Knox

## Results

Overall 60% of nurses returned surveys throughout the year. Thematic analysis has been completed for the first phase of responses. Early findings indicate three major themes contributing to thriving or surviving within CCLHD:

### Group Clinical Supervision

Participants who engaged in Clinical Supervision found the program contributed to their learning, confidence and professional development during the initial transition period. CS was readily identified as a safe, supportive and confidential environment. Early findings also indicate that monthly sessions are not sufficient and that an increase in 'dose' and 'frequency', particularly in the first 6 weeks, would be more effective.

### Leadership and Culture

The NUM is regarded as the culture bearer within the clinical environment. Significant variation in leadership style of nursing teams and units across the district correlates strongly with the quality of professional support during the first graduate year.

### Team Nursing

Participants felt 'well supported' and 'safe' working in a team-nursing model of patient care. An adhoc approach to patient care was described. A significant lack of concept understanding of team nursing was identified as it was often seen as person dependent with some staff unwilling to participate, preferring a patient allocation model of care.

### Perceptions of Support

Support was seen as being dependant on the ward/unit. Support varied from no support, to a 'pot-luck' approach or good support. The induction period was inconsistent across units with the number of supernumerary days received, commencement of night duty shifts and team leader allocation almost immediately.

## Discussion

Findings to date indicate the first six weeks to be a critical transition period for newly graduated registered nurses. There is confusion surrounding concept understanding and the application of a supportive framework surrounding the transition period from student to novice registered nurse.

There is significant concern that this vulnerable cohort are simply *surviving* clinically and professionally, rather than *thriving* into their professional future.

An integrated approach is required to address the projected nursing workforce shortfall. Findings from this research suggest a need for improving nurse retention through early career preparation and support. There is also strong indications that strategic actions designed to build nurse leadership capacity would have substantial impacts.

Completion of the research will generate further understanding of factors that sustain and enable newly registered nurses in the first year of employment. It is anticipated the research will also generate further value of clinical supervision during the first year of nursing and beyond.

Graduate nurses need to be provided with opportunities for informal support through networking, debriefing and sharing with colleagues in a safe environment. Data from this research will be used to build support for ongoing clinical supervision programs for newly graduated nurses at Central Coast Local Health District.

### The Financial Perspective

"We can't afford to spend money on nurses and midwives sitting around talking, thinking and reflecting."

### The Patient Safety Perspective

"We can't afford not to."

## References

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