



Nurses, midwives and the support staff role

Nursing and midwifery work is carried out by individuals or a team of nurses, midwives, assistants in nursing* and support workers with varying roles, varying levels of education and in a variety of settings.

The nursing or midwifery team is led by a registered nurse or midwife who assesses, plans and evaluates nursing or midwifery work and guides its implementation.

Registered nurses and midwives and enrolled nurses, working in clinical practice are primarily responsible for direct person care, and should ensure that this priority is reflected in the work which they undertake.

The priority of the nursing and midwifery professions is the provision of high quality nursing and midwifery to people in any setting.

The environments within which nursing and midwifery work takes place should be managed by registered nurses and/or midwives who supervise and delegate appropriately to ensure the many aspects of nursing and midwifery work are undertaken by persons who have appropriate nursing and midwifery educational preparation.

Work of a domestic, housekeeping or clerical nature is more appropriately carried out by personnel employed to undertake such activities. Employers should ensure that sufficient appropriate support staff are available to enable nurses and midwives meet their direct care responsibilities.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation recommends the adoption of the following guidelines:

Housekeeping and cleaning:

1. Activities associated with housekeeping and cleaning are performed by domestic staff. Examples of such work include arranging of flowers or watering plants, moving furniture and beds, sweeping, washing and mopping floors, washing clothes, cleaning furniture, including beds, trolleys and lockers and changing curtains. In the absence of domestic staff the nurse or midwife should ensure that the immediate care environment is clean and safe. In closed practice environments such as operating suites and procedure areas, the responsibility of the nursing and midwifery staff should be specified by the health or aged care facility policies. When technical equipment is in use, cleaning of such equipment may be a nursing or midwifery responsibility, and if so, should be specified in the health or aged care facility policies.

Food service:

2. It is the responsibility of the nursing and midwifery staff to maintain the optimal nutritional state of the persons for whom they provide care. This includes assisting people with eating or drinking, ensuring that the food supplied is appropriate to the dietary requirements or limitations of the person's condition, and recording the amount of food consumed or rejected by the person before the tray is removed. Other activities associated with the food service are performed by catering staff, such as routine preparation and delivery of meals and refreshments and routine collection and washing of trays and utensils.

Messenger and transport services:

3. All messenger and transport services are performed by support staff, for example delivering specimens, request slips, memos or bulletins, collecting records, obtaining and transferring laboratory results and reports and transporting equipment. Where transport of persons receiving care is undertaken, nursing/midwifery staff may be required to accompany them in accordance with assessed patient/resident acuity and care needs and health and aged care facility policies.

Supply and stocktake:

4. Stock-taking and maintenance of supplies are performed by support staff. Examples include: washing, mending, ironing and delivering of linen, and the ordering of stationery, food, disposable equipment and other routinely used items.

*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled)



Clerical duties:

5. Only clerical duties associated with recording information related to direct nursing and midwifery are the responsibility of nurses or midwives. All other clerical duties should be performed by support staff or clerical staff at the direction of nursing and midwifery staff. Examples include completing business records such as bed occupancy reports and other various forms; entering, filing, posting or otherwise recording entries in the persons notes (other than nursing and midwifery records); routine answering of phones; and arranging routine appointments with clinics or private doctors.
6. Clerical duties associated with patient/client records and/or care progress notes, e-prescribing and the e-administration of medicine or e-diagnostic procedures is the responsibility of the registered nurse, midwife or enrolled nurse within the scope of their practice. Adequate and ongoing education and training in relation to the use of e-technology must be provided by the employer of nurses and midwives where e-technology is part of nursing and midwifery documentation and associated with patient/client care.

*Endorsed by Federal Council December 1989
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