

Guest editorial

Credentialling: the process so far

Chris Hunt & Jane Hellsten

For the Australian Infection Control Association (AICA), 2006 heralded a new stage in professional accountability with the re-launching of the credentialling process to members at the National Conference in Sydney. Since the inception of the idea a decade ago, followed by the formation of the inaugural Credentialling Subcommittee in 1997, the AICA Executive has been committed to offering a rigorous, equitable and transparent process of conferring a credential to infection control professionals (ICPs) who demonstrate competence in the specialist role of infection control. This was borne out of a belief that such a process would be of benefit to individual members and the healthcare facilities that employ them, to the Association and, ultimately, to healthcare consumers.

At the time this concept was not new; in 1991 the Australian Nursing Federation and the Royal College of Nursing formed the National Nursing Organisations (NNO) with an aim to define specialties within nursing and to develop a method of credentialling the advanced practitioners working within those specialties. AICA continues to be a member of the NNO.

In 1998 a draft proposal for the *Credentialling the infection control practitioner* was published with the journal in the National News. This paper then led the debate within the membership and feedback was sought and received guiding the future development of the process. In the same year, the Credentialling Board was formed whose role was to progress the work begun by the Committee. Issues such as the accreditation of tertiary courses, infection control competencies and legal liability presented challenges to be explored. Despite this, a process for credentialling was developed and was first available to the membership in December 2000, and the development of a re-credentialling process was begun.

Unfortunately, uptake of the process was slow, and interest from the membership was disappointing. Because of this poor response, the Board and the AICA Executive extensively and critically reviewed the process, taking into consideration membership feedback. As a result of this, it was decided in December of 2004 that the process of credentialling ICPs should be put on hold and completely revised, with a view to re-launching a revised process at the 2006 National Conference. By June 2005 the AICA Executive approved a change in name of the Board to the Credentialling Committee which was felt to be more in line with other professional groups which have credentialling mechanisms in place. The terms of reference of the

Committee was revised and a marketing strategy and business plan developed.

In September 2005, at the NSW Infection Control Conference held in Sydney, the Credentialling Committee conducted a workshop outlining the progress of the credentialling process within AICA. A presentation was given outlining the advantages and benefits of becoming a credentialled ICP, and informed the audience of AICA's decision to temporarily suspend the processing of credentialling applications. The workshop was well attended and encouraged discussion between members. Various issues, including the potential barriers deterring members from embracing credentialling for their professional development, were raised. These comments were considered by the Credentialling Committee during their review of the process.

By June 2006 the credentialling package had been extensively reviewed and now utilised a point system to enable prior knowledge, experience and qualifications to be recognised. The previous requirement of applicants to have relevant tertiary qualifications was removed, opening up the process to those registered nurses with hospital-based training backgrounds. The new package was trialled with several AICA volunteers who provided feedback.

The revised AICA credentialling process was re-launched at the National Conference in Sydney and initial interest in the revised process has been encouraging. The process leading up to this year's re-launch has been a fairly tortuous one, but one that had to be undertaken. More work is required to continue to progress this process and to ensure we meet the needs of both members and the Association. The AICA members who have assisted in this process have shown dedicated professionalism and determination. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

Currently, vacancies exist on the Credentialling Committee. This is a great opportunity to be involved in this exciting initiative. Interested parties are encouraged to contact the Secretariat. For more information on the role of a committee member contact the committee chairperson Jane Hellsten at Jhellste@bendigohealth.org.au

Members wishing to know more about the process, or who would like an application package sent to them should contact the AICA Secretariat at: aica@ozemail.com.au, or by calling (07) 3211 4695.