

# Realising the value of nursing and midwifery

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2020 is an exciting year for nursing and midwifery as the World Health Organization has designated 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife (IYNM).<sup>1</sup> IYNM is an opportunity to recognise the benefits of nursing and midwifery to the health of people worldwide. The designation of IYNM has been timed to coincide with the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale who, as we all know, is regarded as one of the founders of modern nursing.

According to projections in the Federal Government's Future Focus report,<sup>2</sup> healthcare is slated to be the fastest growing industry by 2050, with nursing in particular to experience the greatest growth in employment. Nurses are the largest single health profession in Australia, comprising more than 40% of the total Australian health workforce. Nurses are the generalists of the health workforce and possess the qualifications, skills and knowledge to provide high-quality health care and perform key functions across all health service settings, in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas. As they are often the healthcare professional with the highest contact rates within acute care, residential aged care and remote settings, nurses are at the forefront in addressing Australia's health needs. Yet the value of nurses to the system and the benefit of nurses working to their full potential is often understated. Enabling all nurses – from early career to later career – to work within their entire scope of practice poses enormous benefits to healthcare systems, health care delivery and ultimately healthcare consumer outcomes. How do we ensure the education of nurses equips them to meet the health care needs of the communities they serve and what can we do to fully realise the value of nursing?

In 2017, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia recognised midwifery as a separate profession to nursing. The

education of midwives has moved to a model suited to the delivery of continuity of care, and there has been considerable growth in midwifery group practices which deliver that model of care. Australia's Future Health Workforce Midwives report<sup>3</sup> found the profession is in balance from a supply perspective, however, there are retention issues associated with newly educated midwives who are seeking to work in continuity of care models. Demand from midwives for jobs in caseload midwifery is higher than the current capacity. How do we reconcile this conflict between service delivery models and the current education programs and enabling midwives to work to their full scope of practice?

With the spotlight on nurses and midwives in the IYNM, the time is right for educational institutions, service providers, regulators and policy makers to work together to address some of the issues in these professions.

## Competing interests

None declared.

## References

- 1 World Health Organization. Year of the Nurse and the Midwife 2020. 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/year-of-the-nurse-and-the-midwife-2020> [verified 17 March 2020].
- 2 Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency. Future focus: 2013 national workforce development strategy. 2013. Available at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2013-03/apo-nid33107.pdf> [verified 30 March 2020].
- 3 Department of Health. Australia's future health workforce report – midwives. 2019. Available at: [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/B55446D9B763E36FCA2584940008F1DB/\\$file/AFHWR-Midwives%20final%20report.PDF](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/B55446D9B763E36FCA2584940008F1DB/$file/AFHWR-Midwives%20final%20report.PDF) [verified 30 March 2020].