

# Re-defining the role of emergency nurse practitioners

11 August 2015, by Sandra Hutchinson



QUT PhD nursing graduate Dr Jane O'Connell has developed a set of clinical practice standards for emergency nursing practitioners.

Dr Jane O'Connell, Australia's first endorsed nurse practitioner specialising in emergency care, is leading the way in re-defining the role specialty nurse practitioners play in the health system.

As part of her PhD through QUT's School of Nursing, Dr O'Connell has developed a set of clinical practice standards for emergency nurse practitioners.

In 1999 the title of Nurse Practitioner was officially enacted into the Australian health care system with a view to improving patient access to quality healthcare, but it sparked a political tussle from some within the medical fraternity.

The Australian Medical Association was specifically against the role, and according to Dr O'Connell it has been an uphill battle for many nurse practitioners to integrate into the system.

She said nurse practitioners were highly educated clinical experts, who require endorsement from the

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia following completion of a Master's degree.

To recognise their technical capabilities and expertise, Dr O'Connell developed a set of clinical practice standards for emergency nurse practitioners.

"These standards build on the generic standards for nurse practitioners in Australia and address the specific clinical requirements for emergency nurse practitioners based on my national research involving staff on the ground," she said

Dr O'Connell is now publicly releasing these standards so professional organisations across Australia can strengthen and standardise the education of emergency nurse practitioner students and support the ongoing development and education of endorsed nurse practitioners who specialise in [emergency care](#).

"For far too long the role of emergency nurse practitioners has been impeded by the belief that they can only treat simple and quick patient presentations, working predominantly in Fast Track zones, but in the field of emergency care, emergency nurse practitioners have demonstrated a role beyond that," she said.

"The success of nurse practitioners in emergency departments has been recognised but there remains a need to acknowledge that they are senior expert clinicians capable of being involved in patient care across the emergency department not just in Fast Track zones or with minor presentations."

Dr O'Connell's research shows that at least 40 per cent of established emergency nurse practitioners nationally are involved in the care of patients across all levels of acuity and urgency in the emergency department, working both autonomously and collaboratively for optimal

patient outcomes.

"While this is often within a multidisciplinary team of health professionals, in some circumstances such as in small rural facilities, the emergency [nurse practitioner](#) is the most senior clinician on duty and manages the complete episode of care including referral or transfer to a larger facility," she said.

"They deliver care that is diverse and flexible and meets the clinical demands of the complexity of emergency department patients and have the ability to respond to any emergency department patient needs from arrival at the [emergency department](#) to discharge."

Dr O'Connell hopes the new [clinical practice](#) standards help solidify the role of emergency nurse practitioners, enable expansion of the role and break down some of the professional barriers that still exist in some hospitals.

**More information:** The standards are available here: [www.azille.com.au/standards.pdf](http://www.azille.com.au/standards.pdf)

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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