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Discussion paper

Development of a position statement for Australian critical care nurse education



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ABSTRACT

Position statements are used by large organisations such as the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses to publically present an official philosophy or beliefs and to propose recommendations. Position statements are increasingly used by health departments and healthcare facilities to allocate resources and to guide and audit nursing practice, yet there are limited resources on the process of their development. A position statement should help readers better understand the issue, communicate solutions to problems, and inform decision-making. It should be supported by the highest level of evidence available and reflect the organisation's governing objectives and goals. In this article, we describe the structured approach used to develop a position statement for Australian critical care nurse education. The formation of an expert advisory panel, synthesis of available evidence using Whittemore and Knaff's integrative review methodology, use of Donabedian's structure-process-outcomes quality framework as a theoretical approach, and multiple layers of consensus building and consultation enabled the development of an important critical care document and informed an implementation plan. The framework and processes we have outlined in this discussion article may provide a useful starting point for other professional organisations wishing to develop similar position statements.

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1. Introduction

Key professional nursing organisations use position statements to provide guidance to the profession or offer an explanation, a justification or a recommendation for a course of action. Definitions of position papers are difficult to locate but have been described as being juxtaposed between a white paper (authoritative guide) and a green paper (consultation document) in affirming consensus opinions about a particular topic. While position statements propose solutions to an issue, they may not go so far as detailing specific plans for implementation. Position statements are used by leading specialist organisations such as the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN) to publically present an official philosophy or beliefs and to propose recommendations.^{1–4}

A position statement is intended to help readers better understand the issue, to communicate solutions to problems, and to inform decision-making. The statement should be supported by the highest level of evidence available and reflect the governing

objectives and goals of that organisation. There is a requirement to regularly review and update a position statement in response to advances in research evidence and changes to practice and environments.⁵ The Board of the ACCCN identified a need to update the 2006 Position Statement on the Provision of Postgraduate Critical Care Nurse Education⁶ in recognition of the dynamic nature of the critical environment and new challenges, developments, and opportunities for critical care nurses. This article describes the development steps for revision of the document (Fig. 1) and recommends a strategy for implementation of the 2017 position statement (Table 1).

2. Development steps

2.1. Step 1: Forming an expert advisory panel

Terms of reference were developed, and an expression of interest was circulated to all ACCCN members (approximately

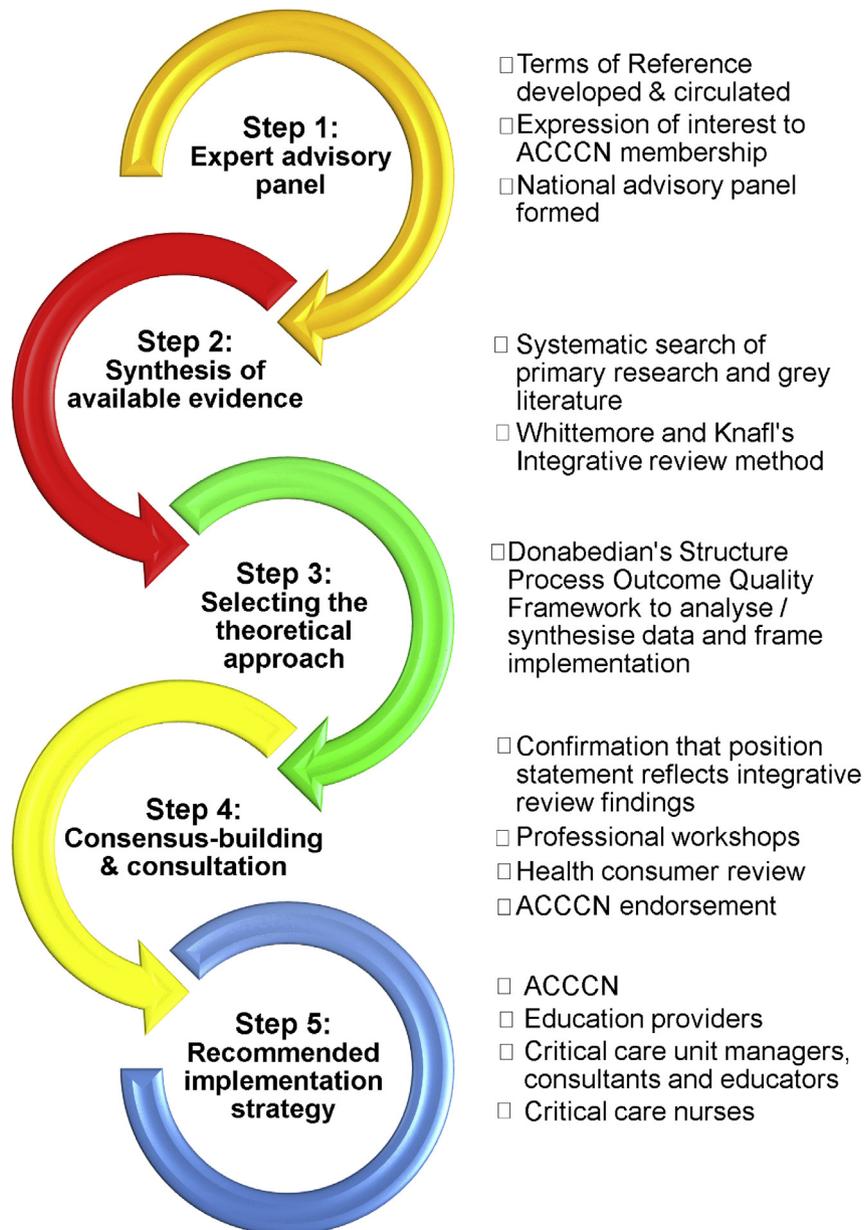


Fig. 1. Position statement development steps. ACCCN, Australian College of Critical Care Nurses.

Table 1
Position statement implementation strategy.

Stakeholder	Interventions
ACCCN	Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action implementation plan • Make position statement freely accessible on ACCCN website • Distribute to ACCCN members, education providers, critical care units, and other stakeholders • Develop dissemination resources (toolkits, media, communications) • Provide and distribute educational materials and events • ACCCN Board and key members act as opinion leaders and champions • Conduct audits to measure the reach of the position statement Advisory panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish integrative review • Publish report of position statement development • Continue to act as opinion leaders and champions
Education providers	Use ACCCN position statement to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop curricula, structure clinical assessment (using SPECT²¹), and evaluate nursing postgraduate programs • map content at each level of qualification to scope of graduate attributes • adopt uniform student entry criteria of 12-month critical care clinical experience • include regular and systematic stakeholder engagement for curriculum co-design, course evaluation, and review of clinical assessment tools • use student feedback processes for the theoretical learning environment • engage with clinicians for content delivery • provide a process for student support in the clinical environment
Critical care unit (managers and educators)	Endorse and use ACCCN position statement to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and evaluate 'in-house' critical care unit nursing programs • use Clinical Nurse Educator positions co-ordinate continuum of critical care nurse education from the entry level through postgraduate critical care programs to continuing professional development at the specialist practice level • structure professional development plans • develop registers of accredited unit preceptors • adopt named preceptors for transition to practice (TTP) program participants • provide congruent rostering (aim of $\geq 40\%$) of TTP preceptors with TTP participants • include a nomination process and support for nurses to undertake postgraduate courses • provide incremental exposure to increasing patient complexity
Critical care nurses	Use ACCCN position statement to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a professional portfolio to map ACCCN practice standards to current capability, including a personal professional development plan and provide evidence of ongoing professional learning • engage in structured student feedback processes • engage in professional development planning and opportunities • mentor junior staff • develop assessment skills and be an accredited unit preceptor • demonstrate lifelong learning

ACCCN, Australian College of Critical Care Nurses.

2500) to form a national advisory panel (AP) to guide and undertake the project for the following year. A total of 18 participants responded to the expression of interest. The AP consisted of experienced critical care nurse educators and academics from the higher education and healthcare sectors (public, private, metropolitan, regional, and rural) from five Australian states and territories. At the first face-to-face meeting of the AP, a plan was developed that identified and prioritised the activities for the position statement update.

2.2. Step 2: Synthesis of available evidence

To inform the new position statement, the AP undertook a detailed integrative review of research literature and grey literature (such as professional standards and statements) that had been published since the last major literature review in 2012.⁷ The integrative review method described by Whittemore and Knaf⁸ is widely used in nursing research.⁹ It was selected as a review framework by the AP because this methodology facilitates a broad review with the potential to capture diverse and complex data sources including quantitative, qualitative, mixed method studies, and standards and statements from professional organisations. The AP then interrogated and synthesised the literature to reveal the contemporary structures, processes, and outcomes of critical care education. This would enable the development of a contemporary and relevant position statement.

2.3. Step 3: Selecting the theoretical approach

The AP used Donabedian's structure–process–outcome (SPO) quality framework to guide both the literature review and the development of the position statement.¹⁰ The SPO framework appeared an obvious fit, given it has been widely used to examine and evaluate the quality of health care.¹⁰ Donabedian's three interrelated concepts, i.e., SPO, formed the basis of the review questions and the initial deductive approach to data analysis. Applying the SPO and Whittemore and Knaf's ten elements⁸ to the subsequent inductive data analysis enabled the synthesis and creation of a concept map summarising the key findings. The integrative review¹¹ that informed the development of the position statement is published in this issue of Australian critical care.

2.4. Step 4: Consensus building and stakeholder consultation

Consensus approaches have been widely used in nursing to reach agreement on challenging research areas.^{12,13} Kirk et al.'s iterative consensus-building approach¹⁴ guided this step that consisted of several layers. First, the AP reached an agreement that the position statement be structured to reflect the integrative review findings and clearly show the continuum of critical care nurse education from the entry level through postgraduate critical care programs to continuing professional development at the specialist practice level.

Next, aiming to develop the position statement over a short time scale (12 months) without being overly burdensome for stakeholders, the AP selected a convenience sample of critical care stakeholders at the scheduled state or national critical care nurses' events to gather stakeholder input. Two workshops designed to elicit feedback on the draft position statement were held: first with critical care nurse educators in Queensland and second at the ACCCN national Continuing Education Conference in Hobart with critical care nurses attending from five states and territories who represented clinical practice, management, education, and research. The literature review key findings, the concept map, and the proposed position statement were presented and discussed, and data were collected as written responses from participants and note-taking by the workshop convenors, allowing further refinement of the position statement.

The third consultation step was to work with health consumers to incorporate their input into the position statement. Consumer and community participation in health research means consumers and community members working in partnership with researchers to shape decisions about research priorities, policies, and practice. In this way, consumers and community members are key participants of the research process.¹⁵ The National Health and Medical Research Council promotes the development of stronger partnerships between researchers and consumers and emphasise many benefits to researchers, including increased public awareness and understanding, community relevance, public confidence, and improved accountability leading to more effective translation into practice.¹⁶ The contribution of health consumers to shaping ACCCN Position Statements¹ also aligns to the ACCCN aims of improving the care and outcomes of critically ill patients and their families.¹⁷ Three health consumers who each had experience as either a patient in critical care or a family member were recruited from two states (New South Wales and Western Australia). They were requested to review the position statement to provide feedback on “is the language clear?”; “the significance and importance to health consumers”; and “the potential impact of the position statement on future critical care nurse practice”. The health consumers provided detailed and valuable responses that enabled editing for improved clarity and confirmation that the position statement was important and relevant to health consumers.

The final consultation step was to receive comments and endorsement from the ACCCN: the ACCCN Education Advisory Panel and the Board of ACCCN. The Board endorsed the 2017 Position Statement on Critical Care Nurse Education. A launch was held at the Annual General Meeting of the ACCCN at the 2017 Annual Scientific Meeting on Intensive Care, and the position statement was made available to members on the ACCCN website.

2.5. Step 5: Recommended implementation strategy

After the consultation phase, our final activity was to recommend an implementation strategy. The 2017 position statement provides guidance to all critical care nurse education stakeholders; however, a targeted implementation strategy will maximise the impact of this important knowledge translation tool.¹⁸ The potential for evidenced-based recommendations to be overlooked was described in a recent scoping review that identified barriers to uptake of evidence-based recommendations by policy makers. These included the lack of awareness, lack of motivation, limited understanding, information overload, lack of features to make them easy to interpret, concepts not clearly presented, accessibility problems, and lack of resources.¹⁹ These barriers have led to an increasing emphasis on using systematic approaches to translate research into policy and practice.²⁰ The importance of proactive,

multifaceted interventions to increase the implementation of research into practice has been demonstrated in a robust analysis of systematic reviews.²¹ In this context, given the known diversity of the position statement target audiences, with limited resources, varying motivation and capacity to interpret the key position statement messages, effective implementation of the position statement requires a systematic, active, and multifaceted approach. An implementation strategy targeting ACCCN, education providers, critical care unit managers, consultants and educators, and critical care nurses is outlined in Table 1.

3. Conclusion

We have identified how a structured approach using an inclusive and rigorous review methodology and a highly applicable theoretical framework enabled the development of an important critical care document and informed an implementation plan. Position statements are increasingly used to allocate resources and to guide and audit nursing practice. There is limited evidence or resources available to nurses wishing to develop position statements. The framework and processes we have outlined in this commentary article may provide a useful starting point.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Fenella J Gill: conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing, visualisation, project administration, funding acquisition. **Frances Lin:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, visualisation. **Deborah Massey:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, visualisation. **Lorraine Wilson:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, visualisation. **Melanie Greenwood:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, visualisation. **Katina Skylas:** methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, visualisation. **Mark Woodard:** methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, visualisation. **Agness Tembo:** methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, visualisation. **Marion Mitchell:** methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, visualisation, writing – original draft. **Janice Gullick:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, visualisation.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aucc.2018.08.001>.

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