13 May 2011

Ms Sharyn Cody
Program Manager
Health Workforce Australia
GPO Box2098
Adelaide  SA  5001

Dear Ms Cody,

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Clinical Supervision Support Framework. The ACMHN is the peak professional mental health nursing organization and the recognised credentialing body for mental health nurses in Australia. The ACMHN sets standards for practice and works to promote public confidence in and professional recognition of mental health nursing.

The ACMHN is generally supportive of the National Clinical Supervision Support Framework. We believe it addresses the main concerns and issues of mental health nurses and other nurses. We note that translating the principles outlined in the framework into practical measures and strategies will be a challenge, requiring ongoing activity and resources. The College is keen to continue to be part of this work.

The College believes the approach taken to terminology and definitions is a practical and useable way to manage the diversity of terminology across professions. Within Mental Health Nursing, Clinical Supervision has an alternative use. It would assist mental health nurses and other professions with a similar issue if the title of the Framework had a sub-title that explicitly referred to clinical education and training. This would reduce misinterpretation of the scope of the Framework at the outset.

The ACMHN strongly supports the principles under the category of quality as they address known issues and challenges associated with mental health clinical placements. It is well recognised that students’ experiences during mental health clinical placements are a major influence on their perception of mental health generally and as a potential career pathway. The education program attributes principle is particularly relevant to the area of mental health clinical placements for nursing students. The MHNET report into Mental Health in Pre-Registration Nursing Courses found that the use of well-
informed, and well-trained clinical teaching staff who are familiar with the students’ curriculum and learning needs is important. Principles 5 and 6 reflect this need.

Principle 6 refers to the diversity of experience including exposure to non-traditional settings. In The MHNET report identified that there is a need to ensure that mental health clinical placements are provided in a range of services, including community mental health services, primary mental health care and rehabilitation settings. The ACMHN strongly recommends that HWA, as it supports the implementation of these principles, direct funding towards the establishment of clinical placements in such non-traditional settings. In the area of mental health, the NGO sector delivers a wide range of services, including clinical services, to people with mental health issues. The ACMHN believes that mechanisms are needed to encourage and support NGOs to host students on clinical placements. The College would be happy to discuss how this could be achieved with Health Workforce Australia.

Another factor that impacts on clinical placements in mental health is that students may hold stigmatised views of mental illness and have high levels of fear or anxiety about mental health placements. Orientation and support for students in mental health placements, along with the other elements outlined in principle 7 will help to address these issues.

The focus on culture in the Framework is commended by the ACMHN. Across the health care system, there is wide diversity in the organisational cultural support for clinical education. Principle 9 – Resources refers to an appropriate funding and resource base. Nurses who undertake the role of clinical supervisor may not receive any additional financial remuneration for the additional responsibility and functions. Other professions have clear expectations that financial remuneration is provided to individuals who are supervising students. The ACMHN believes that health care organisation and education/training organisations should ensure individual clinical supervisors receive consistent financial rewards. This financial recognition is as important as non monetary recognition.

A strategy that could increase the support for students on clinical placements and increase the organisational focus on education and training is to create mentoring roles for experienced nurses. The ACMHN would also suggest that one way to increase the support for students on clinical placements is to take advantage of the ageing mental health nursing workforce. The College’s experience has revealed that experienced mental health nurses are keen to share their experience through mentoring roles. We
recommend that positions be created for experienced mental health nurses to provide clinical supervision in a part time capacity.

The ACMHN looks forward to working with Health Workforce Australia to implement the National Clinical Supervision Support Framework. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or queries regarding our comments.

Yours sincerely,

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