



**POSITION STATEMENT  
PROVISION OF CRITICAL CARE NURSE  
EDUCATION  
11 June 2020**



## REVIEW GROUP

This Position Statement on *Provision of Critical Care Nurse Education* was prepared by a WFCCN Review Group:

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## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the WFCCN review group was to review and update the existing Declaration of Madrid. The aim of the revised Position Statement is consistent with the original Declaration:

to provide international recommendations based on universal principles to help guide health services, educational facilities and critical care nursing organisations in the development of appropriate educational programs for nurses who are required to care for critically ill patients and their families.

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## PREAMBLE

The *Position Statement on the Provision of Critical Care Nursing Education* was first released in 2005 as the *Declaration of Madrid* (WFCCN, 2005) with the aim to provide international recommendations based on universal principles to help guide health services, educational facilities and critical care nursing organisations in the development of appropriate educational programs for nurses who are required to care for critically ill patients and their families. Due to changes in critical care worldwide, the WFCCN Board of Directors commissioned a review of the 2005 Declaration. As a result of this review, revisions were undertaken. This document represents the 2020 *Position Statement: Provision of Critical Care Nurse Education*.

## INTRODUCTION

Critical or intensive care is a complex specialty developed to serve the diverse health care needs of patients (and their families) with actual or potential life-threatening conditions. Critical care nurses collaborate with the interprofessional team by providing a focus on:

the assistance, support and restoration of health or the delivery of pain management and preparation for a dignified death to critically ill patients (WFCCN, 2016).

Opportunities for professional reflection and professional development are essential components of a healthy work environment. Critical care nurses must receive support to remain current and competent in a rapidly changing environment. Shared accountability exists between the nurse and their organization for professional development within work environments (Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses, 2018).

The critical care nurse enhances delivery of holistic, patient-centered care in a high-technology, high-touch environment by providing evidence-based best practice to patients and their families. Registered nurses working in critical care settings require specialized knowledge and competencies not typically included in entry-level nursing programs in most countries.

Regulatory, professional and educational bodies governing the practice of nursing must recognize the importance of providing dedicated specialist education for critical care nurses to ensure safe and high quality health care in order to deliver optimal patient outcomes. This position statement is intended to advocate for guidelines universally accepted by critical care professionals across the world, which may be adapted to meet the educational and health care contexts of a country or jurisdiction.

## METHODS

Following establishment of a review group comprised of critical care clinicians, leaders and researchers from four continents, a literature search was undertaken, which informed the review of the 2005 Declaration and its subsequent revision contained in this 2020 Position Statement. Several drafts were reviewed and revised, culminating in international discussions about the purpose and content. A final draft, comprised of central principles and recommendations, was approved by the WFCCN Board of Directors on 11 June 2020.

## POSITION STATEMENT: PROVISION OF CRITICAL CARE NURSE EDUCATION

### Central Principles

1. Critically ill patients and families have the right to receive individualized, evidence-based critical care from qualified professionally registered nurses.
2. Critical care registered nurses must possess advanced knowledge and skills to effectively meet the needs of critically ill patients.
3. Basic nursing education programs do not typically include advanced theory and practice curriculum related to the specialized knowledge required of critical care nurses. Access to initial and ongoing professional development opportunities must be provided to registered nurses responsible for the care of critically ill patients and their families.
4. Registered nurses with specialized knowledge and expertise in the provision of care to critically ill patients should play an integral part in the education and preparation of critical care nurses.
5. The preparation of critical care nurses must be accessible, evidence based and include a sufficient experiential component (e.g. high-fidelity simulation and preceptorship in the critical care unit)
6. Professional certification or post graduate qualification in critical care nursing is recommended and demonstrates achievement of specialized knowledge that meets national and international standards required for delivery of the safest nursing care to critically ill patients.



## WFCCN Position

Critically ill patients have unique needs and must be cared for by registered nurses with specialized critical care knowledge and competence. The following recommendations represent universal principles to help guide health centers, educational facilities and critical care nursing organizations in the development of appropriate educational programs for registered nurses who are required to care for critically ill patients and their families:

1. As a minimum, programs preparing critical care nurses should include the following content at a depth that reflects an advanced understanding of critical care phenomena:
  - anatomy and physiology
  - pathophysiology
  - critical care pharmacology
  - advanced health assessment skills
  - interpretation of diagnostic and laboratory tests
  - arrhythmia interpretation and 12-lead ECG interpretation
  - hemodynamic monitoring
  - recognition and management of sepsis
  - recognition and management of life-threatening emergencies
  - invasive and non-invasive mechanical ventilation
  - prioritization of care for a critically ill patient
  - advanced communication skills with critically ill patients and families
  - psychosocial, cultural and spiritual care of patients and families
  - additional specialized technology applications including artificial intelligence
  - patient and family education
  - legal and ethical issues
  - professional nursing issues and roles in critical care, including clinical teaching strategies, team leadership and management issues
  - safety and quality
  - evidence-based practice
  - caring for the caregiver (including dealing with moral stress, burnout, mentorship and peer support)
  - effective collaboration within interprofessional health care team.
2. Programs preparing critical care nurses for a specialist level of practice should be provided at a post-registration level and conducted by a higher education provider (for example, a university or equivalent provider).
  - 2a. The curricula of critical care nursing post-registration courses must provide an appropriate mix of theoretical learning and clinical practice experience (clinical preceptorship and simulation), to prepare registered nurses with the competence required to deliver safe and high-quality nursing care.
3. WFCCN recommends that national critical care nursing associations establish agreed Standards of Practice for Critical Care Nursing that can be operationalized as a framework for both critical care curriculum development and assessment of clinical practice competence.
  - 3a. National critical care nursing associations consider developing and implementing professional critical care nursing professional development programs based on a practice standards that reflects the expected level of competency for critical care nurses in their country.
  - 3b. Where professional certification and/or post graduate qualification programs exist, employers should continuously strive to maintain a nursing workforce that has attained specialized certification in critical care nursing.
  - 3c. National critical care nursing associations are encouraged to recognize post-graduate critical care nursing certification as one of the elements of hospital accreditation.
4. Post graduate qualification courses for critical care nurses must provide a balance between clinically oriented content and broader generic content that enables the specialist nurse to contribute to the profession through processes such as research, practice development and leadership.
5. Close collaboration between the health care and higher education is essential to ensure that post-registration critical care nursing education is provided at a standard that meets the needs of critically ill patients and their families.
6. Graduates of post-registration courses in critical care nursing must be able to demonstrate clinical competence as well as a sound theoretical knowledge base. A strong emphasis on the application of theory to practice, cultivation of professional attitude, and the assessment of clinical competence, should be an integral component of post-registration critical care courses.
7. The provision of appropriate clinical experience to facilitate the development of clinical competence should be a collaborative responsibility between higher education and health care providers. Critical care nursing students should have access to support and guidance from appropriately experienced staff such as clinical teachers and nurse preceptors.
8. Clinical teachers and nurse preceptors for post-registration critical care nursing students should be qualified at least at the level that the post-registration student will attain upon graduation and be appropriately supported in their role by both education and health care providers.
9. Critical care education higher education providers should have policies and processes in place for recognition of prior learning and alternative entry pathways into formal post-registration specialist courses, to create a more flexible yet consistent means for students to attain recognition of competence.
  - 9a. Providers of short critical care training courses should seek credit transfer (recognition of prior learning) within the higher education sector for nurses completing these courses.



10. Health care and higher education providers should provide initiatives to support nurses that face access and financial difficulties when undertaking post-registration critical care courses.
11. Higher education providers must implement multiple educational modalities (online, blended learning, simulation) with a focus on experiential ('hands-on') practice-based learning and evidence-based practice. Accessible education is important to provide ongoing professional development opportunities to critical care nurses in both urban and remote geographical areas.
12. Innovative strategies need to be implemented to address the potential deficit of qualified critical care nurses. Such strategies could include comprehensive critical care workforce planning, innovative retention strategies, refresher 'training' in simulation, ongoing professional development programs and the provision of greater support for nurses undertaking post-registration critical care courses. Shortening critical care nursing education programs to improve availability of nursing staff should not be considered an acceptable strategy to resolve staffing deficits.

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