

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

December 24, 1998

We were pleased to see the Perspective of the Nursing Education Council of BC (NECBC) published in the September/October 1998 issue of CJNA, as we believe the matter of competencies in general, and competencies required of new graduates in particular, to be of critical importance. Our hope in submitting the Paper for your consideration was to raise awareness and invite dialogue on nursing competencies.

NECBC's position paper on Validation of National Nursing Competencies concluded with three recommendations. The recommendations concerned the future direction of the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia (RNABC) with regard to the further validation of the competencies, the distribution of the developing document on competencies, and the need for further critique of competencies as the sole route to entry to practice.

NECBC has been impressed with the responsiveness of the RNABC to many of our concerns. Since the presentation of NECBC's position paper to the RNABC Board in March, 1998, there has been several positive developments. While the overall direction in British Columbia, to develop clearly articulated competencies required of a new graduate around practice exemplars, is continuing, the manner in which it is progressing is positive.

NECBC's request that RNABC proceed with caution has been heeded, and an improved validation process involving a more consultative, comprehensive, and inclusive methodology has been put in place. A second document titled, "Competencies Required of a New Graduate, Fall 1998 version", has recently been released. This document expands the validation to three other age groups, strikes a better balance in moving beyond institutional care, and encompasses family as client and community as client.

An area that merits further consideration in nursing jurisdictions across Canada, however is the need for scholarly debate around the notion of nursing competencies and their usefulness in depicting what is required for nursing practice, particularly at the entry level. We are long overdue for a vigorous debate about the national Nursing Competency Project outcomes, and competencies themselves in light of conflicting pressures about entry-

level requirements. These pressures are reflected most recently in the decision of the Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health to "recognize diploma preparation as meeting the basic requirement for entry to practice" (Duffy, 1998).

In the light of anticipated long-term nursing shortages, nursing leaders are facing unprecedented challenges to ensure a well-qualified nursing workforce within a socio-political environment that fails to acknowledge the extent of knowledge and skills needed for professional nursing practice. In addressing these challenges, part of the discussion must include the role of competencies in depicting practice requirements.

Sincerely,

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Reference

Duffy, C.A. (December 11, 1998). Letter to Dr. M. E. Jeans, Executive Director, Canadian Nurses Association, copied to all Provincial and Territorial Nursing Associations.

The Canadian Journal of Nursing Leadership (CJNL) welcomes letters responding to previously published articles or letters of opinion on current topics in nursing leadership.

Letters should be sent to the editor and may be shortened based on space limitations. Anonymous letters will not be considered for publication. Letters from writers who wish their names to be withheld may be accepted following verification.