

Media and Communication Principles for Nursing and Midwifery in Australia



National Nursing and Nursing Education Taskforce N³ET

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The N³ET is committed to building an enhanced and sustainable healthcare system through the promotion of professional visibility and pride, quality education and regulation to nationally consistent standards and capacity in practice, education and research for all nurses and midwives across Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

Nursing and midwifery have changed considerably over the last 50 years.

Developments in technology, shifting community demographics, the move to university education and the emergence of new allied health roles have all contributed to the constantly evolving role of nurses and midwives in the community.

Unfortunately, public perception has not kept pace with the contemporary reality of nursing and midwifery. The persistence of outdated images, stereotypes and perceptions have affected recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives, which remains a concern to health bureaucrats, not just in Australia, but worldwide.

Misconceptions about the roles of nursing and midwifery influences respect for and the public recognition of the importance of nurses and midwives in our health system. This can serve to devalue their roles and contributions.

The media is a powerful tool in shaping community perceptions of professions like nursing and midwifery. The challenge is to promote positive, contemporary images of the reality of nursing and midwifery to those responsible for creating media and imagery, regardless of whether they are within or beyond the health sector.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The value, contribution and benefits of a nursing or midwifery career need to be promoted to improve the portrayal of and communications about nursing and midwifery in the future.

The National Nursing and Nursing Education Taskforce (N³ET) worked with a group of media and communications experts to develop a set of communication principles and a national marketing profile (brand) for nursing and midwifery for this purpose. The aim of these principles is to inform and inspire those responsible for portraying nurses and midwives in communications media.

Media and communication principles are relevant to all organisations wanting to recruit nurses and midwives; from a university looking to attract applicants to a hospital wanting to attract more nurses or a government department wishing to raise awareness of nursing and midwifery as career choices. They will be useful to States and Territories, universities, the vocational education and training sector, career counsellors, employers and others concerned with recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives.

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THE PROCESS

Workshops

Developing the communication principles provided the opportunity for interaction and dialogue with nurses and midwives across Australia and built on work undertaken here and overseas.

Workshops were conducted in every State and Territory to consult with nurses and midwives working in a wide range of roles, health care settings and with different levels of experience. Other interested stakeholders including secondary school students, student nurses, government policy officers and workforce planners, representatives from industrial and professional organisations and consumers also participated in the workshops.

The workshops explored

- How nurses and midwives view their own brand and the associations they wanted communicated for nursing and midwifery. A list was developed of more than 100 potential brand attributes.
- The stereotypes and myths that get in the way of positive images of nursing and midwifery and how to debunk them.
- Positive examples of the portrayal of nurses and midwives that have been well received in their respective marketplaces, including government and non-government campaigns and careers materials promoting nursing and midwifery.
- How new recruits would benefit from a career in nursing and midwifery and what a difference nurses and midwives make to individuals and our community.
- Communications opportunities that are available to positively portray nursing and midwifery. These range from photographic images and written material, through to advertisements, websites and TV dramatisations.

Review of the literature and existing material

A targeted literature and internet search has been undertaken to determine whether any principles already exist for communicating the role and value of nurses and midwives.

There has now been a vast amount of work by a wide range of sectors to promote nursing and midwifery as careers. Professional groups, speciality nursing colleges, private and public hospitals, other employers and education providers have all played a part in the recruitment drive.

Every State and Territory has devoted considerable resources to developing marketing materials such as websites, DVDs/videos, brochures, posters and other promotional items to promote nursing and midwifery as a career and a valuable community resource. They created these materials to suit their specific context and needs, and while each one takes a slightly different view on how nursing and midwifery should be portrayed, all had very clear themes running through them.

They demonstrate that nursing and midwifery are caring, rewarding careers. They also highlight the diverse and challenging aspects of careers that are teamwork-focussed.

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The principles provide guidance to communicators both within and beyond the health sector, as well as in the advertising and communication industry.

They provide a basis for changing the way nurses and midwives are portrayed in the wider community and they support recruitment and retention campaigns undertaken by each State and Territory, recognising that local health and workforce issues are drivers of communication materials.

To ensure success, the principles are supported by a number of other elements, which together facilitate the production of communications that reflect the contemporary image of nursing and midwifery.

They include key messages for potential nurses and midwives about the benefits of a career in nursing and midwifery, as well as the benefits to the community of the work of nurses and midwives. The brand attributes or core qualities of nurses and midwives that are universal are included as they inform the tone, style and design elements, sound and visual imagery used in communications but not always communicated in words.



MEDIA PRINCIPLES

These media principles and associated elements aim to inform and inspire those responsible for portraying nurses and midwives in the media. They are not a substitute for the creative elements for any actual communications materials; they are the overarching principles — the building blocks of understanding for communicators to draw on and be guided by when creating campaigns and communication materials involving the image of nursing and midwifery.

The principles fall into two distinct categories: **What** communications need to contain to reflect the contemporary image of nursing and midwifery and **How** to develop communications that will ensure a contemporary portrayal of nursing and midwifery, the key messages that should be present in communications materials and the brand attributes or nurses and midwives.

WHAT

1. Communications display the generational diversity and the role of men in nursing and midwifery.
2. Communications about nursing and midwifery reflect Australia's cultural diversity including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
3. Communications demonstrate the different roles and responsibilities of nurses and midwives.
4. Communications demonstrate the diverse career paths within nursing and midwifery in a variety of health care settings.
5. Communications exhibit the value and benefits of the work nursing and midwifery bring to the community in which they work.
6. Communications demonstrate the innovative models of care being delivered by nurses and midwives and their changing practice.
7. The visual portrayal of nurses and midwives, and any accompanying sound tracks reflect contemporary images of nursing and midwifery.
8. Communications exhibit the brand attributes and key messages as agreed by the nursing and midwifery profession.
9. Communications demonstrate that nurses and midwives are educated health professionals who use their sound knowledge in daily decision making.

HOW

Communications will better reflect the contemporary reality of nursing and midwifery if communicators;

- Consult with and involve working nurses and midwives in the planning and production of communications
- Market test the creative concepts with the target audiences
- Recognise that any communication about nursing and midwifery impacts on recruitment and retention to and within the professions
- Understand that a range of customised approaches will be required to effectively recruit to the diverse roles within nursing and midwifery
- Utilise the appropriate language and terminology that is related to nursing and midwifery practice
- Use the brand attributes and key messages as agreed by the professions.

Key messages

Careers in nursing and midwifery offer:

- Diverse roles and opportunities.
- Personal reward in making a difference.
- Challenging work.
- A formal career path with increasing responsibility and autonomy.
- A pathway to management.
- Opportunities to be well paid.
- Travel, mobility, freedom.
- Worldwide work opportunities.
- Flexible employment conditions.
- The respect and trust of the community.
- The chance to be at the heart of the community.
- Participation in a dynamic, technologically advanced profession.
- Nationally-recognised qualifications and registration.
- Opportunities to specialise.
- Friendship and fun.
- Helping the community to live better and longer.
- Enhancing community wellbeing and individual quality of life.
- Transitioning people through all stages of their lives.
- Helping people to navigate the health system.
- Promoting patient client independence.
- Undertaking or applying best practice research.
- Advocating for change in health policy and practice.
- Acting as a linchpin in an effective, efficient health system.
- Helping to manage the health needs of an ageing population.
- Saving lives and healing.
- Helping to bring new life into the world.
- Informing illness prevention and health education.
- Giving patients dignity, peace of mind and comfort.

Key messages about the community benefit of nurses and midwives

Nurses and midwives make a difference by:

- Providing skills and knowledge that are crucial to the care of patients and clients.
- Understanding the broader picture of the patient's needs.
- Solving problems by drawing on evidence-based knowledge and experience.
- Ensuring safe, quality, coordinated and continual care.

Brand attributes of nursing and midwifery

The core qualities of the contemporary nurse and midwife are:

- Professional
- Highly qualified and skilled
- Excellent decision-makers and managers
- Team players
- Caring
- Patient/client champions and communicators
- Versatile

HOW TO USE THESE PRINCIPLES

The first step is for nurses and midwives to embrace, promote and endorse these principles for communications portraying nursing and midwifery.

The challenge is to use the principles, key messages and brand attributes to overcome stereotypes of nurses and midwives, using tools, tactics and media opportunities for communicating positive contemporary images of nursing and midwifery.

Communication Opportunities

The primary audience for the communication principles is those who have a vested interest in improving the retention and recruitment rates of nurses and midwives.

- Government departments and agencies preparing recruitment and retention campaigns
- Universities and training providers preparing promotional material to attract potential students to a course of study
- Careers advisors who prepare and provide material on careers in nursing
- Employers seeking to recruit to nursing and midwifery positions
- Professional groups promoting careers in specialised areas of practice.

While governments across Australia have already undertaken some excellent work, further opportunities can be explored to ensure that communications campaigns reinforce only positive, contemporary and, where appropriate, inspirational images of nursing and midwifery.

Communications industry

The advertising and communication industry is the key secondary audience for the principles, as it is a powerful communication channel to the wider community and potential nurse audiences. The industry includes:

- advertising agencies
- public relations agencies
- media production houses
- specialist health
- medical

- marketing and advertising media (journalists, editors and executive producers in print, electronic and online media), and
- industry professional associations and regulators.

Adoption of these principles by advertising and communication industry will

- enhance working relationships with government, health and education sector clients, nurses and midwives who are committed to promoting nursing and midwifery, and
- play an important part in the recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives to professions that are the backbone of Australia's health system.

There are two categories of media to be considered in improving the contemporary portrayal of nurses and midwives:

- paid media, where the client has control over the messages and images portrayed, and
- unpaid media, where there is no control over the media images and content, but which can have a significant influence on the public's perception of nursing and midwifery.

While the primary focus of these principles is the paid media, where governments and health and education sector communicators are producing communication campaigns and tools, there are also opportunities to influence unpaid media. Positive examples of this can create the kind of third party credibility that paid communications cannot provide.



Living the brand

It is important to be able to identify champions from within nursing and midwifery who have the skills and confidence to undertake or participate in speaking, presentation, interview and panel discussion forums. These champions will then develop a media profile that will encourage their further use by media and sector communicators as effective advocates for nursing and midwifery.

Ultimately the communications and media principles will only improve recruitment and retention if nurses and midwives themselves live and speak the positive image they provide in their daily encounters with the community and other target audiences.

'Nurses & midwives are highly capable and skilled professionals who display initiative and leadership in advancing health care.'