

# **Nursing in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Definition**



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# Introduction

A definition of nursing is a useful reference point for nurses to articulate their role and contribution to improving health outcomes for people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Any definition of nursing in Aotearoa New Zealand needs to be one that all nurses can identify with, that reflects our nursing whakapapa (our history and culture), that differentiates nursing practice from the practices of other health care workers in terms of its significance for health, health care, and the delivery of services, and that recognises the fiscal issues/responsibilities facing the health sector. The 2010 definition has been developed based on a wide-ranging consultation process and literature review, drawing on the expertise and knowledge of New Zealand nurses. Defining nursing will always be a work in progress. The definition will continue to evolve as nurses explore its meaning: for practice; for considering nursing education and research direction; for contributing to health policy; and for advocating the employment conditions of nurses. Further information on the background and history of the Aotearoa New Zealand definition of nursing along with associated references can be found on the NZNO website.

## NZNO Definition of Nursing

Nursing in Aotearoa New Zealand is an evidence-based practice discipline underpinned by nursing theory and research. Nursing's core focus is people (he tangata) – with or without disease. Professional nursing practice attends to the differing ways in which people experience health, well-being, illness, disability, the environment, health care systems, and other people, and brings coherence to all that contributes to positive health outcomes. It is the relational processes, knowledge and skills of nursing that enable people to get on with their lives, whatever their health circumstance. Nursing assures a human face in health care. The discipline of nursing in Aotearoa New Zealand addresses the uniqueness of our cultural experience: professional nursing practice is founded on whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga, and wairuatanga.<sup>1</sup>

Nurses assume various and evolving roles in the health workforce, spanning the settings of the health sector – in institutions, homes and mobile through communities – reaching across boundaries of all public and private service sectors. Nurses work collaboratively with others to address health need and provide professional, equitable, effective, and empathetic nursing care for individuals, families whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, and the wider society. Nurses have education and regulation through which they develop nursing practice, and the fiscal consciousness required for them to practise in roles that are complementary to, facilitative and integrative of the roles of medical practitioners and other health care workers. As such, they are key to the quality and cost of health care provision and innovation in service design and delivery that aims to advance the health of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Nurses self-define these terms through culturally safe practice.

## Differentiating the discipline of nursing as defined<sup>2</sup>

The 'complementarity of disciplines' diagram (following page) depicts the nursing discipline representing a perspective of health that differentiates the professional scope of nursing practice from the scope of medical practice (or the practice of any other practitioner of a health-oriented discipline). Identifying this nursing perspective of health, relevant in the contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand context, is the purpose of the NZNO effort to define nursing. The following is an explanation of the elements of the diagram:

"Professions are distinguished by their particular perspective on health (the population of interest to us and what we pay attention to in practice). From this perspective professional practitioners can explain:

- > their practice (what we do – skills and activities);
- > what their practice achieves for people (why we do what we do);
- > what role/s they play in relation to the roles of other practitioners (how we work together to define and achieve desired health outcomes).

Professional practitioners are knowledgeable of health from their distinct professional perspective of health. This knowledge is developed through programmes of education and research, framed according to theories that bring coherence to the health purpose in practice (the discipline of nursing). The professional scope of practice is defined by the health purpose that differentiates each discipline.

When practice contributions to health are differentiated according to disciplines, healthcare can be approached as inter-disciplinary and practitioners can develop their roles to be complementary.

Many tasks, procedures and technical skills and activities can be performed by many health practitioners and other supporting health care workers. The health sector workforce comprises personnel trained to perform them safely, with protocols: training and employment are fit-for-purpose. But it is the registered practitioners of each discipline who determine how, when and under what conditions these are carried out: with their perspective and knowledge they take leadership and accountability for achieving the health purpose as a collaborative interdisciplinary effort."

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<sup>2</sup> Presented by Merian Litchfield as part of the consultation for writing the definition of nursing, 2010.

# The Complementarity of Disciplines

Some technical skills & activities performed by various practitioners and support workers.

