PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES REGISTER AND ASSOCIATED AMENDMENTS TO THE NURSES AND MIDWIVES ACT

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Health (MOH) is considering establishing an Advanced Practice Nurses (APN) Register, and making some associated amendments to the Nurses and Midwives Act. The Register will list the names of registered nurses who have the necessary qualifications, competence and experience to practise as APN in the adult health, paediatrics or mental health setting. The amendments to the Act are consequential but we are also taking the opportunity to update the Act.

MOH would welcome the views and feedback of the public, nurses and healthcare professionals on the proposed APN Register and the various amendments to the Act. All feedback should reach the Ministry by 19 September 2004.

RATIONALE FOR SETTING UP AN APN REGISTER

Over the years, some registered nurses have acquired advanced practice nursing expertise through formal training. More have expressed a keen interest to pursue such advanced training. This is a trend which MOH encourages. It raises the status of the nursing profession and it recognises the potential for some registered nurses to take on added responsibilities like performing physical assessments and ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests; planning and managing patients with complex health problems in collaboration with other healthcare professionals; and initiating treatment according to an approved protocol. The services provide by the APN will complement the care provided by doctors, making them even more valuable partners in the healthcare team.

This move also benefits patients, through better nursing care and cost control as the extended scope of practice of the APN can allow them to take on some of the routine duties of the junior doctors. This will free up the doctors to spend more time on patients who require a higher level of medical care. The benefits of advanced practice nursing expertise will be especially
evident in areas where there is a shortage of doctors, for example in psychiatry and geriatrics.

**BENEFITS OF AN APN REGISTER**

**On the Public**

5. The development of advanced practice nursing will raise the standard of nursing care. Patients will receive better care as APN becomes more effective partners in the healthcare team. Besides a higher standard of nursing, counselling, education and health advocacy will be important components of the comprehensive care provided by APN.

6. This will also help control healthcare cost as doctors can be freed up from some routine functions which can be undertaken by APN. In some cases, new services can also be developed, for example, pain management service, where there are not enough doctors available to provide such a service.

**On the Nursing Profession**

7. Nurses have traditionally progressed in their career by moving up either the management or the education track. While this is to be encouraged, in many instances, invaluable clinical experience and expertise are unfortunately lost when experienced and competent nurses are promoted out of clinical areas to become managers or educators.

8. The establishment of an APN Register will open up an alternative promotion track to allow experienced and skilled nurses who have the necessary advanced qualifications to remain in clinical setting without compromising their career development. In this way, we hope to better retain good nurses in the profession. The United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have this career track for their nurses and have found it to be successful.

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE NURSES AND MIDWIVES ACT**

10. Amendments are proposed to decriminalise minor offences like failure to inform change of name, home and practice address, and to include administrative or civil sanctions to replace or complement existing criminal offences.

11. Section 19(3) requires a person to surrender his certificate of registration/enrolment if his registration/enrolment is cancelled because he has not renewed his practising certificate for a continuous period of not less than 5 years. Since a valid practising certificate is required before a person can practise as a nurse/midwife, there is no need for this procedure which has
created a fair bit of administrative work for the Board to follow up, and collect
the certificates from these persons.

12 The Ministry welcomes your comments or questions on the proposed
establishment of an Advanced Practice Nurses Register and amendments to
the Nurses and Midwives Act. Please submit your feedback online at

The Ministry of Health
20 August 2004