

26/3/2020

Chief Nursing Officer letter to Nurse Leaders

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Let me begin this pānui with a thank you to all our frontline health care workers and in particular our nurses and midwives who are going above and beyond the call of duty during this extraordinary and unprecedented time of COVID-19.

The impact of COVID-19 is significant, as a global event this has had and continues to have an un-paralleled effect on all of our lives, no one is exempt.

As I have met with respective nursing leadership groups over the past couple of weeks, there are key themes and issues emerging. Whilst this is a fast-evolving situation, the intent of this pānui is to provide you an update on nursing specific and related matters. I trust that you are regularly checking in on the official NZ COVID-19 website and the MoH COVID-19 website pages.

In this pānui I will cover four initial key issues and will update you at least weekly on other matters as they arise.

Essential health care services and workers

Information on essential services in the health and disability system under Alert Level 4 have been posted on the MoH COVID-19 website via the following link:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public/covid-19-essential-services-health-and-disability-system>

This information will be updated regularly, if you do not see an essential worker or service on this list then there is an ability to submit a request for consideration via an email link on the website.

Nurses expressing an interest to assist in the COVID-19 response

The Nursing Council of New Zealand (NCNZ) have developed a robust process for nurses wishing to renew their annual practicing certificate (APC). Please direct nurses to the NZNC website to make such a request https://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/NCNZ/News-section/news-item/2020/3/Returning_to_Nursing_during_COVID_19_Pandemic.aspx

The MoHs Health Workforce Directorate has set up a URL for health professionals to register their interest to support the COVID-19 response: <https://tinyurl.com/COVID-19nz>. As of this morning over 1,500 health professionals have registered through this mechanism.

This process is not to supersede local initiatives that are in place but does provide a central point to register interest. The Workforce team will also be developing a request register for providers and employers to log their workforce and surge requests. The team will then undertake a matching process to align the requests with the workforce database.

Student nurses and disruption to clinical placements

You will note that student nurses (RN and EN students) are not featured on the Essential Health Care service and workers list. Extensive discussions have occurred with Nursing Heads of School, Nursing Council, and DHB Directors of Nursing to determine the best course of action in this situation.

While there are many variables to this discussion, it is necessary to advise that at this time nursing students should not be within clinical settings and environments.

The criteria for a clinical placement remains, and in this current state of emergency and Alert level 4 - ensuring and maintaining effective preceptorship, RN oversight, alignment to learning objectives, and competency assessments cannot be guaranteed. The safety of the students is paramount.

While it is noted there will be a disruption to students learning (specifically for their clinical experience) and in particular year three students on transition and completing their qualification, Nursing Council assures the sector that any disruption to student progress and completion will be managed on a case by case basis. The July state exam may be deferred however there is a plan to run exams more frequently to ensure the pipeline is not significantly affected.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Concerns have been raised about the supply, allocation and utilisation of PPE. The current demand is exceeding supply and I need to reassure you that reviewing current stocks and distribution is occurring, and the Ministry will soon release details on how this is to be managed.

I am also receiving feedback on the rationalisation of PPE, where infection prevention control principles are being compromised as well as limited access to PPE. I am confident that you will all be reminding our teams in collaboration with your respective IPC teams that the principles of good practice should not be compromised.

Further advice and guidance will be provided by the Ministry within the next 24 hours relating to the above. In the interim the following is a message from the MoH National Health Coordination Centre (NHCC)

“Current demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) is unprecedented. The Ministry recognises this is causing concern among the increasing number of clinical staff being brought in to help manage the COVID-19 outbreak. Measures to address immediate needs, which include a limited urgent release of equipment and accompanying guidance, will be announced within 24 hours. These measures are in addition to a longer-term solution which is also being worked through. The safety of staff is a top priority as we work through this fast-evolving and challenging time”

2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife

We always knew that 2020 was going to be a big year for nursing and midwifery but no one would have anticipated the current situation. Within the realm of uncertainty there is one thing we can be certain of, and that is the important role of nurses, midwives, kaimahi and other health professionals in an event such as this.

We must not allow COVID-19 to cast a shadow on the Year of the Nurse and Midwife, in fact this extraordinary situation only highlights the pivotal and powerful contribution that our workforce can make.

As we commence the first day of a State of Emergency and Alert Level 4, we need to do our best to keep our whānau and communities safe. I am confident that as nursing leaders of the Health and Disability sector you are all playing a pivotal role to ensure services continue to be delivered to the highest standard, maintaining a patient and whanau centric approach, while keeping our workforce safe, well-resourced and informed so that they too can keep our whanau and communities safe.

Naku noa,

Margareth Broodkoorn
Chief Nursing Officer
Ministry of Health