

30 AUG

To The Productive Commissioner.

My name is Rebecca Coulter and I have practiced as a Maternal and Child Health Nurse in rural Victoria since 2005, working with diverse family situations- young mothers, low socio economic, aboriginal, non-English speaking and other cultural minority groups, within my role as a Maternal and Child Health Nurse, and more recently Immunisation Nurse.

I am registered as a midwife and nurse with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority. I completed my Master of Nursing Science in Child, Family and Community Health through La Trobe University in 2004. The exorbitant cost of Maternal and Child Health post graduate studies would have prohibited me from choosing to undertake this course, however after lobbying local council, I was able to secure some financial assistance to help pay for the tuition fees.

It is the recommendations 12.3 and 12.2 of the Early Childhood Development Draft Report that concerns me, in particular the removal of the midwifery prerequisite of Maternal and Child Health Nurses. The service, which I am proud to provide, is dependant in the thorough study criteria and educational preparation so far required of clinicians in this field. Working in Maternal and Child Health prior to having children of my own, my midwifery skills are essential in connecting with families and understanding the challenges that they face. I frequently draw upon the skills and knowledge I obtained in midwifery particularly with the establishment of breastfeeding and counselling families about their birth experiences. Many families are using our service when experiencing subsequent pregnancies which midwifery knowledge and skills assist me in providing health promotional advice and education.

One experience working in Maternal and Child Health which I recall my midwifery knowledge and clinical skills essential was recently when advising a woman who was having a secondary post partum haemorrhage. My midwifery skills assisted me in differentiating between normal post partum loss and abnormal loss requiring medical attention. Thus I also believe it crucial that all Maternal and Child Health Nurses are nurses, providing strong foundations for evidenced based clinical judgement.

Holistic and family centred care has evolved from my tertiary studies. Possession of these qualifications is not a barrier to Maternal and Child Health Nursing, rather the basis of quality care.

Whilst I hold Practise nurses in high regard for their specific service provision, education of practice nurses is neither standardized or accredited and thus the suggestion that practice nurses may substitute maternal and child health nurse is unacceptable.

I strongly support the value of expanding scholarship programs as I have experienced firsthand the amount of hard work and commitment it takes to gain the level of clinical expertise currently required to graduate as a Maternal and Child Health Nurse. The costs involved to undertake Maternal and Child Health studies was my biggest concern when deciding to do the course. I would not have undertaken the study if it had not been for the assistance provided by the local council.

Living on the border of Victoria and NSW I could have chosen a cheaper and shorter course offered through South Australia and then worked in NSW. However having experienced the difference in services provided to young families in Victoria and NSW, and seeing many border families travel to Victoria for their Maternal and Child Health care, I chose to undertake the longer and higher qualifying, Victorian course so I was able to provide the same high quality of care I had seen provided by the Victorian Maternal and Child Health Nurses. Given the shortage of services in our rural environment the current study schedule provides graduates with the multi tasking capabilities required to offers our families high quality care.

I am very concerned about the limited consultation undertaken by the Productive Commission with Victorian Nurses, our service is widely respected and I would be grateful if the Commission would meet with myself and my colleagues to expand knowledge of the depth of service provided by current nurses.

Yours Sincerely,

Rebecca Coulter

Maternal and Child Health Nurse

Moirra Shire Council.