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My name is Sue Harrison and I have practised as a Maternal and Child Health Nurse in Victoria for the past 18 months after completing my Graduate Diploma in Child and Family Health Nursing with Distinction at RMIT, Bundoora in 2009.

I was accepted for a scholarship after applying to the Monash City Council in 2008 to undertake MCH post graduate studies. I had previously applied to Bayside City Council approximately 4 years prior to this, but was unsuccessful in my application, so chose not to undertake the course as I would have incurred financial hardship. As well as the financial burden this extra qualification would incur, there was no opportunity to increase my gross income from shift work, penalty rates or salary packaging, so it would have been many years before I would be able to pay back the full cost of university fees. Without the offer of a scholarship I would not have undertaken MCH Nursing (unless the pay rate was more attractive than it currently is).

I completed my general nurse training at the Alfred Hospital in 1977 and worked in the medical and surgical areas there for 18 months, before completing a Communicable Diseases Course at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. After completing this 12 month course I gained further experience there working predominantly with children suffering from Infectious Diseases until 1980. It was this experience that initiated my interest in working with children at a later date and proved invaluable in enhancing my understanding of infectious diseases and the complications that arise from these illnesses.

I then completed my 12 month Midwifery training at the Mercy Hospital for Women in East Melbourne. I gained experience after completing this course at Dandenong and District Hospital working in all areas of midwifery.

From then, I worked at a large metropolitan hospital in Fitzroy for 20 years in Childbirth Education (as a childbirth educator), the ante-natal and postnatal areas and also studied to achieve my current qualifications as an International Board of College Lactation Consultant. I worked in the Breast feeding Support Service there for approximately 7 years. Additionally, during my time spent at this hospital, I studied at RMIT University in Bundoora to achieve a post-graduate diploma in Psychiatric Nursing as I wished to gain further insight into supporting women suffering from a mental illness including ante-natal and postnatal depression.

I am currently registered as a midwife and nurse with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority.

My submission is limited to Chapter 12 of the Early Childhood Development Draft Report, and the "Child Health Workforce".

Recommendations 12.2 and 12.3 question the value of scholarships for the MCH programs of study and the removal of midwifery as a qualification pre-requisite for MCH nurses. I strongly believe that without the offer of scholarships for MCH training it would cause a reduction in the number of nurses interested in undertaking MCH studies. As I have mentioned earlier, it was the offer of a scholarship that enabled me to undertake my MCH studies.

My midwifery knowledge has been paramount in understanding the emotions, and general health and well-being of a new mother and her family. Without the experience and consequent insight gained from caring for and supporting women during their pregnancy and the puerperium whilst working in the midwifery areas I would not possess the invaluable skills I have today to practice as a MCH Nurse.

I have been able to support women to continue breast feeding when they are at their most vulnerable point. The wealth of professional skills I have achieved as a midwife gives me the confidence to contribute positively to the families I support. Without these skills I would not have the body of knowledge I have today that I find invaluable in providing comprehensive care to mothers, families and children as clients of the MCH service.

Working as a general nurse has also further enhanced my skills by providing me with a strong foundation on which I have built my skills.

I am disappointed that The Productivity Commission has not allowed adequate opportunity to consult with Victorian Nurses. I hope that the Commission will meet with MCH nurses to gain further understanding of the Victorian MCH framework and how this service provides the best service in Australia which is reputedly envied by other Australian States. It is my hope that the quality of our Victorian Nursing Service is not diminished but upheld and that the other states are given the opportunity to provide equally such an invaluable service.

Thank-you for considering my comments.

Susan Harrison  
(Registered Nurse, Registered Midwife, Reg. Psych Nurse, IBCLC).