

## Reflections on nursing: how changes to the Australian research system will work to nurses' advantage



### GUEST EDITORIAL

**Mary Courtney**, RN, BAdmin(Acc), MHP, PhD, FRCNA, AFCHSE  
Assistant Dean (Research) Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Australian nurse researchers operate in an environment which will look significantly different in 6-12 months time. A deeper understanding of how the research system will work is gradually unfolding and no doubt we will see some new funding schemes start and perhaps some existing schemes end before 2010.

### Excellence in Research in Australia

Although the Research Quality Framework (RQF) is no longer with us, its replacement, the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) initiative is well underway and requires universities to continue to build a performance culture focused on excellence and impact in order to achieve high research rankings. Nurse academics will come under significant pressure to increase levels of engagement in quality nursing research activity and demonstrate tangible research outcomes eg publication in quality refereed journals; higher degree research student completions; and external research income.

### Review of the National Innovation System

In January 2008, Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, commissioned a Review of the National Innovation System, led by Dr Terry Cutler with over 700 submissions received. The report titled 'Venturous Australia' was released in August 2008 making several recommendations across a range of areas.

The report highlighted how the research quality rankings produced by the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative may influence funding allocations to universities in the future.

While this undoubtedly poses a challenge, confronting the ERA plays to the inherent strengths of nursing research. The ERA list of ranked quality journals will likely include several dozen nursing journals providing an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to the broader scientific community the significant contribution nursing research makes in addressing major national health priorities of promoting and maintaining good health in an ageing society where increasingly the need for services to manage both the normal ageing process and the long-term impact of chronic illness is required.

### Review of Cooperative Research Centres

As part of its review of the national innovation system, the Australian government commissioned a review of the cooperative research centres (CRC) program in January. This report titled 'Collaborating to a purpose', was released in August 2008 finding the CRC program should continue because it is still plays a very important role in Australia's innovation system by encouraging large-scale collaborative research across the nation. The report made a number of recommendations which aimed to address several perceived problems raised in submissions made to the review panel.

Of particular interest were recommendations highlighting that achievement of public good outcomes should be a major objective of CRC's rather than the current emphasis on commercialisation outcomes. The report noted public funding provided to CRC's should be dependent on the level of social benefit likely achieved by the CRC.

This change in the Australian Government's strategic direction clearly highlights the future opportunity for nursing research to be positioned at the forefront of health science research endeavours. The move away from commercialisation as a primary outcome to the exclusion of public good outcomes offers nursing research the chance to expand the already substantial impact it has made on the health of the public. Nursing research is well positioned to be at the forefront of addressing the national health priorities of health promotion and disease prevention and improving the quality of life through self-management, symptom management and care provision as well as leading research in addressing end-of-life issues.

Nurses are very well placed to build external research partnerships with industry partners, government (local, state and federal) and community organisations. This success is underpinned by nurses' strengths in applied research and our ability to translate research outcomes into real-world solutions. Excellence in partnership management is of major importance in fostering ongoing relationships.

As we look ahead and Governments eventually come to understand the significant social benefits and public good outcomes achieved by nursing research, it is my dream that nursing research will receive the funding it deserves in order to address some of the most important health care issues confronting our society.