



## Reimagining nursing: A professional awakening

### Te whakahou i te hauora me te tārei hou i te mahi tapuhi: He ohonga mauri ngaio

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The world has changed and so too has healthcare. How people engage with their health and health systems has significantly evolved over the last twenty years; globally health has seen a digital transformation, with healthcare science advancing rapidly. The pandemic has opened a new world both in terms of care delivery and medical advancement. Some of these changes are positive some have been challenging. The lack of human connection particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted those needing care and those providing it (Castaldo et al., 2022; Holaday et al., 2022). Equally, mental health, health inequity and climate change are constant companions in a changing world.

In response, the profession and the educational preparation of nurses must change. Even this statement, changing in response, is problematic and a symptom of a reactionary approach to nursing in Aotearoa. Ideally, we should be anticipating in advance of these changes, constantly looking ahead. But we don't do this, and therefore, it feels like we are asleep at the wheel and being led by the nose by those outside of nursing. If we do not do something radical, we will continue to have things done to us and remain situated as powerless victims and continue to say the same things that have been said for decades. We write this to be provocative. This provocation is an attempt to lead a necessary discussion about the future of nursing. To that end, we have a radical idea, let us reimagine nursing in Aotearoa and then rewrite the nursing curriculum. What better time than now when there is a commitment to build a national

health system that will perform better for all; in partnership with Māori and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Future of Health, Te Anamata o Te Oranga, 2022). This editorial is intended to challenge and elicit a response deliberately; we welcome your engagement, suggestions, and disagreement to ignite an overdue professional conversation on this critical topic and to chart a visionary future.

We believe the preparation of nurses is not fit for purpose. The curriculum is, in our view, outdated and preparing nurses for a practice environment that no longer exists. The model of education and career planning (what some call the pipeline) remains static. What is needed is a radical re-vamp of the curriculum to prepare nurses for the future; this shift needs to be directed by nurses who have a passion and clear vision of what future healthcare environments will entail. We need nursing futurists to lead and drive these changes. Sadly, it is not easy to identify these individuals. The challenge then is how to grow this capability; we may need to look to those educated in 'future thinking methods' to enable us to create a curriculum that educates nurses with the future in mind.

A national nursing curriculum overhaul is critical to our professional survival and adaptability to the current and future healthcare climate. Our leading nursing organisations are a vital part of the shift in creating a curriculum that supports nurses in embracing the future. The Nursing Council of New Zealand recently released a new strategic plan that requires "us to be sustainable, responsible and future



focused" (2022, p. 11). Furthermore, the 2022-5 strategic plan for the College of Nurses Aotearoa (2022) states that the College intends to shape "health policy, funding and system design" (p. 5), whilst being "a key influencer of policy and funding decisions at critical decision points" (p. 6). They also expressed the aim of being "part of the design and systems decisions" (p. 6). These two strategic documents indicate the need for a sustainable and strategic direction for nursing.

We propose that several key areas be introduced, extended, or embedded into nursing curriculum in Aotearoa for us to respond effectively and intentionally to the future. Before we outline these changes, we need to be clear that we are not squeezing more into the already overcrowded curriculum but reconceptualising the preparation of nurses in Aotearoa. These key areas we speak of focus on te ao Māori (Māori world view) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems), digital health technologies, futurist and systems thinking.

There has been much work in building an appreciation of te ao Māori, tikanga and mātauranga Māori and the need to walk alongside tangata whenua safely, and we commend those leading the way. Our recent Health and Disability System Review (Health and Disability System Review, 2020) and the Wai 2575 (2019) report vividly demonstrate that we do not meet the needs of tangata whenua. The curriculum is undoubtedly one way to advance te Tiriti commitments, but we must also invest in constructing an environment where our Māori nursing students are supported through flexible education systems. Māori nurses need to be enabled to care for Māori communities. These shifts are vital to build an Aotearoa with whānau-centric healthcare at its foundation. The unification of the three Bachelor of Nursing programmes across Te Pūkenga network has at its core an Indigenised curriculum that aspires to produce culturally safe graduate nurses. This is a positive step for nursing and for tangata whenua. Still, how will we know that we have indeed educated a culturally competent profession; there is a difference between reality and rhetoric.

One of the most significant educational needs for future-oriented nurses is capability in digital health assessment, diagnostics, information, and communication technologies (Nazeha et al., 2020). Increasingly, healthcare is being delivered via digital technologies (telehealth, personalised health,

wellbeing, and monitoring Smartphone Apps, AI machine learning, and augmented and virtual reality devices), which puts health information into people's hands, driving changes in how healthcare is provided. Access to information is also improving health literacy (for some populations - but that is a conversation for another editorial). The healthcare system has seen exponential growth in health and medical science, with rapid changes in diagnostics, therapies, and medical technologies. Nurses must adapt and keep well-informed of these advances and ensure the changing technologies and people's health requirements are appropriately met. It is important that nurses receive an education that encompasses digital technology because nurses need to be actively informing developments so that technology is not solely disease-focused but encompasses the holistic and relational aspects of healthcare interactions. Hopefully, with the proper education, nurses will be creating the technology that responds to people's health needs. Consumer-driven healthcare will challenge the traditional practices of nursing, and thus our nursing education must adapt. Nursing is a socially mandated service meaning the nature and demands change along with the changes that occur in society.

The idea of nurses as futurists has long held our attention. Being a futurist is not about being a dreamer; it is about engaging in training that teaches particular methods to assess the future and planning for it through well-thought-out strategies (Archibald & Barnard, 2018). Nurses are more than capable of engaging in futures methodology. Being exposed to these approaches should also be a part of the nursing curriculum to inspire nurses to respond strategically to future challenges.

Finally, we propose that systems thinking should be a crucial part of our undergraduate nursing curriculum. Systems thinking allows people to understand complexity holistically and sustainably; it facilitates progress through effectual action within complex systems and contexts (Khalil & Lakhani, 2022). Healthcare systems are inherently complex and understanding systems thinking will enable nurses to contribute to effective changes. These can occur at the micro or macro levels, but effect change begins through understanding systems thinking. We posit that nurses will not be able to effectively participate in future changes to the healthcare system without this knowledge.



How we incorporate these new skills into a three-year degree needs considerable thought. We argue that the fundamentals of nursing undergraduate education should include diverse and challenging topics, such as the ones we have raised in this editorial, because they are *fundamental* to how nurses will effectively contribute to the future of our health system and improve health outcomes in Aotearoa. The practice of nursing can't be static; it must evolve and change, responding to the contingencies of the moment. With that in mind, how do we make a profession excited about their role in shaping the future of healthcare and service delivery? The profession needs to attract people who can innovate and think outside the box, and we need people who understand that advocacy and voice are intrinsic to professional ways of being. Maybe now is the time to examine a four-year degree, or explore a pathway from healthcare assistant to nurse practitioner? In as much as the world is desperately short of clinical nurses, the preparation for nursing faculty and researchers at doctoral level is abysmal. Overall, the nursing workforce needs to be better prepared and awake to the realities of practice and have the professional wisdom to know how to adapt and create its own solutions.

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