

**The New Zealand nurse practitioner polemic:
A discourse analysis**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research has been to trace the development of the nurse practitioner role in New Zealand. Established in 2001, this advanced nursing practice role was birthed amid controversy as historical forces at play both inside and outside nursing struggled for power to control the future of the profession. Using a discourse analytical approach informed by the work of Michel Foucault, the study foregrounds the discourses that have constructed the nurse practitioner role within the New Zealand social and political context. Discourses, as explained by Foucault, are bodies of knowledge construed to be ‘truth’ and connected to power by reason of this assumption, serving to fix norms and making it virtually impossible to think outside them. Discourses of nursing and of medicine have established systems of disciplinary practices that produce nurses and physicians within defined role boundaries, not because of legislation, but because discourse has constructed certain rules. The nurse practitioner role transcends those boundaries and offers the possibility of a new and potentially more liberating identity for nurses and nursing.

A plural approach of both textuality and discursivity was used to guide the analysis of texts chosen from published literature and from nine interviews conducted with individuals who have been influential in the unfolding of the nurse practitioner role. Both professionally and industrially and in academic and regulatory terms dating back to the Nurses Registration Act, 1901, the political discourses and disciplinary practices serving to position nurses in the health care sector and to represent nursing are examined. The play of these forces has created an interstice from which the nurse practitioner role in New Zealand could emerge.

In combination with a new state regime of primary health care, the notion of an autonomous nursing profession in both practice and regulation has challenged medicine’s traditional right to surveillance of nursing practice. Through a kind of regulated freedom, the availability of assessment, diagnostic and prescribing practices within a nursing discourse signals a radical shift in how nursing can be represented. The nurse practitioner polemic has revolutionised the nursing subject, and may in turn lead to a qualitatively different health service.

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PHOTOGRAPH

Figure 1: Is that a nurse? Stu McKellar Bassett, (photographer). 2002. Used with permission. 228

List of Abbreviations

ACC	Accident Compensation Corporation
APC	Annual Practising Certificate
ASMS	Association of Salaried Medical Specialists
BN	Bachelor of Nursing
CCP	Clinical Career Pathway
CTA	Clinical Training Agency
DHB	District Health Board
ECA	Employment Contracts Act
GMS	General Medical Subsidy
GP	General practitioner
HORAA	Health Occupational Registration Acts Amendment
HPCA	Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (Act)
HWAC	Health Workforce Advisory Committee
ICN	International Council of Nurses
IPA	Independent Practitioner Association
MOH	Ministry of Health
NCNZ	Nursing Council of New Zealand
NENZ	Nurse Executives in New Zealand
NETS	Nurse Educators in the Tertiary Sector
NP	Nurse practitioner
NPAC	New Prescribers Advisory Committee
NPAC-NZ	Nurse Practitioner Advisory Council New Zealand
NZMA	New Zealand Medical Association
NZNA	New Zealand Nurses' Association
NZNO	New Zealand Nurses Organisation
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZTNA	New Zealand Trained Nurses' Association
PHO	Primary Health Organisation
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
RN	Registered Nurse
RNZCGP	Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners
SANS	School of Advanced Nursing Studies