17 June 2013

Perioperative Nurses College
New Zealand Nurses Organisation
PO Box 2128
Wellington 6140
By email: pnc.sec@xtra.co.nz

Attention: Sharyne Gordon, Office Administrator

Re: Proposal of formalising the role and education pathway of the Registered Nurse who is providing anaesthetic assistance to the Anaesthetist within the perioperative continuum.

We thank the Perioperative Nurses College of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation for making this document publicly available for comment. We are pleased to respond to the opportunity and to provide our feedback on this proposal.

About NZSA
The New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists Inc., (NZSA) is a professional medical education society established in 1948. It represents some 450 medical anaesthetists in New Zealand and works to foster education and research into anaesthesia and support the professional interests of its members. Members include specialist and GP anaesthetists, those in training and honorary and associate members. NZSA is a member society of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) and is represented at Executive level of the WFSA.

Our Feedback
Below is our response to each of the questions listed in the Survey Monkey link contained in the consultation document. We have copied the responses below into that survey form.

Question 2
The definition of Anaesthetic Nurse as a “Registered Nurse who is competent to care for the patient undergoing anaesthesia” implies that the Anaesthetic Nurse will be able to perform these duties independent of medical supervision. It is the view of the NZSA that Anaesthesia is a medical specialty and that the Assistant to the Anaesthetist must perform their duties under the direct supervision of an Anaesthetist.

Similarly the use of the word “collaboration” and the phrase “function in a supportive role” fail to convey the direct supervision under which the Assistant to the Anaesthetist must work.

The NZSA believes the definition of Anaesthetic Nurse should be in keeping with College Document PS8 2012: The Anaesthetic Assistant must remain under the immediate direction of the anaesthetist until instructed that this level of assistance is no longer required (1.2.1) and...
while assisting the anaesthetist, the assistant must be wholly and exclusively responsible to that anaesthetist (2.6).

**Question 3**
The NZSA is supportive of the use of ANZCA College Document PS8 2012 as a guide for the development of a framework, but notes that this document is not mentioned at all in the framework provided and the framework has not adopted its recommendations.

The framework fails to acknowledge the required 150 hours of lectures or indicate where this training will take place. NZATS and AUT documents are cited, but it is unclear whether either of these organisations will participate in training, assessment or continuing professional development.

College Document PS8 2012 requires successful completion of assignments appropriate to the curriculum and completion of internal assessments and designated examinations. These requirements are not referred to in the consultation document.

Similarly the framework fails to outline how skills in anaesthesia equipment checks will be acquired or how these skills will be assessed.

College Document PS8 2012 requires input from Anaesthetists in curriculum development, preparation and delivery of lectures, practical supervision and assessments. Once again, the framework does not meet these requirements as it currently stands.

College Document PS8 2012 requires continuing education of assistants and although the consultation document requires the attendance at conferences and educational sessions, these must be appropriate to the practice of anaesthesia.

In New Zealand the requirements of College Document PS8 2012 for training, assessment and examination of Anaesthetic Assistants are met by AUT and the NZATS registration examination. The training in Anaesthesia Technology through AUT has provisions for nurses who wish to extend their scope of practice into this highly specialised field.

Given the highly successful programme currently in place for training Anaesthetic Technicians and the large number of nurses who now have completed this training it is difficult to understand why this well-established programme has not been incorporated into the proposed education pathway for Registered Nurses to train to provide Anaesthetic Assistance.

The NZSA is supportive of the programmes run by AUT and NZATS and recommends that these programmes form the basis for Anaesthetic Nurse training.

**Question 4**
The College Document PS8 2012 has a very comprehensive list of skills expected of the assistant to the anaesthetist. While many of these skills are listed in the consultation document it is unclear from the framework how these skills will be acquired, formally assessed or maintained.
New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists (Incorporated)

Some of the skills listed in the ANZCA document are more clearly specified than those listed in the framework document:

1. “Maintains anaesthetic equipment as required at the end of the list” should be replaced by the college’s requirement of an “in-depth understanding of the care, use and servicing” of the following:
   i. Anaesthetic delivery systems and ventilators
   ii. Monitoring equipment including ultrasound devices
   iii. Airways devices including fibre optic instruments
   iv. Intravenous devices

2. “Ensures storage, preparation and use of all drugs, fluids and other substances administered during anaesthesia” should include reference to training in “cleaning and sterilisation of equipment, infection control issues and pollution protection”.

Our principal concern is that there is no reference to the manner in which these skills will be taught, assessed and maintained. In order to comply with the requirements of College Document PS8 2012, training, assessment and maintenance of these skills requires a structured programme of study, assessment and continuing professional development.

The comment that the “Skills will be specific to the requirement of the workplace requirement” suggests that the skills taught will be tailored to each institution or workplace. This is of concern as it implies that the high standards of skills training and assessment required by the College will be adjusted to meet institutional requirements. The risk of this approach is that it may provide a pathway for nurses who wish to dabble in this highly specialised field rather than commit to a full and comprehensive course of study.

The NZSA would not support such dabbling, where “skills will be specific to the requirements of the workplace requirement”. Clinical situations are virtually never simple or “specific”, and untoward events may occur at any time. For this reason, NZSA sees no place for skills specific to the requirement of a particular workplace. Either the requirements of College Document PS8 2012, with full training and assessment, are fulfilled and therefore acceptable, or they are not.

Question 5

In the column labelled “Knowledge” the only new knowledge recorded is “assessed as competent to perform a level 2 and 3 machine check using NZATS competencies”. It is unclear how this assessment will be made and by whom. As it is an assessment of the NZATS competencies it is assumed that this assessment will be made during the NZATS registration examination, but this is not made clear.

The College Document PS8 2012 has a very comprehensive list of knowledge expected of the assistant to the anaesthetist. Many of these requirements are missing from the proposed knowledge list and it is unclear whether this knowledge will be expected, or where this knowledge will be obtained.

The “source of knowledge” required by ANZCA includes:
- A course of lectures of at least 150 hours duration (the content of which is specified in the
addendum and is directly related to the practice of anaesthesia, as opposed to the generic teaching found in an under-graduate nursing degree)
- Supervised practical experience in anaesthetising locations
- Successful completion of assignments appropriate to the curriculum
- Successful completion of internal assessments, including demonstrated competencies and designated examinations
- Input from anaesthetists in curriculum development, preparation and delivery of lectures, practical supervision and assessments

The NZSA would strongly recommend that ANZCA, NZATS and AUT are actively involved in the development of both the knowledge base and the course of study for those nurses entering this educational pathway.

**General Comments**

New Zealand has world-class standards for patient safety under anaesthetic care and this is largely due to the excellent standards of training and practice of our anaesthetists and their assistants as set and supported by our College. The standards of anaesthesia assistance are prescribed in College Document PS8 2012, and met by training through AUT, and examined by the NZATS exam.

This system works extremely well, as evidenced by our safety figures. There is already a well-paved pathway in place for Registered Nurses to further their training as Anaesthesia Assistants, and we cannot see a reason for an alternative or less comprehensive pathway.

The statement in the Consultation Document that “Skills will be specific to the requirement of the workplace requirement” along with the apparent lack of appreciation of the knowledge required of anaesthesia assistants suggest a “dabbling” or make-shift approach that concerns the NZSA greatly. This approach suggests the role of the Anaesthesia Assistant is not taken seriously, and by implication, perhaps patient safety is not taken seriously.

This approach is not acceptable to NZSA. We expect NZ anaesthetists to practice to the highest training and standards, and we expect our assistants to practice to similar high training and standards.

Thank you again for making this document available for comment. We would be pleased to communicate with you further to progress this proposal.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rob Carpenter
President