Media Release 4 September 2009

Education enhances importance of practice nurses

Applications are now open for the 2009 Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (for Practice Nurses). The Scheme, funded by the Australian Government, provides the opportunity for nurses, including practice nurses, to enhance their professional development through further education.

The practice nurse scholarships administered by APNA are open to all nurses working in a general practice environment. Belinda Caldwell, APNA CEO said “The role of practice nurses is continuing to grow and the need to encourage the development of this specialised area is integral to ensuring the success of primary health care reforms in Australia. The Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme will provide training and support to practice nurses seeking to expand their professional skills and is fundamental to the nurturing of a strong nursing workforce in general practices providing quality and effective primary healthcare.”

Since 2005, over 1,550 scholarships have been awarded to Australian practice nurses. It is the largest ongoing practice nurse scholarship program in Australia, significantly contributing to the quality of care and scope of treatment available to patients within the general practice setting. As the complexity of conditions seen by practice nurses increases, these scholarships play an invaluable role in facilitating quality education and improving the management of health conditions and clinical practice.

Current research conducted by APNA indicates that practice nurses who have undergone further education are able to provide additional and improved patient services. Practice nurse Katherine Treble from Nagambie in Victoria said “The scholarship program has enabled me to become a credentialed nurse pap-test provider working alongside 2 male GPs in a rural practice. As the nearest female alternative pap-test provider is 35-50kms away, this accreditation provides a much needed service in our community and will hopefully lead to a greater number of women being screened routinely.”

This year over 500 scholarships are available for up to $1,500 to cover professional development and education or training in the following areas:

- Asthma and respiratory
- Cardiovascular care
- Chronic disease management
- Clinical skills competency based
- Diabetes management
- Health and clinical assessment
- Immunisation
- Mental health
- Obesity, food and nutrition
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Women’s health (including pap smear)
- Wound management
Over 20 postgraduate scholarships are also being offered this year. These postgraduate practice nurse scholarships provide up to $10,000 towards the cost of a postgraduate course.

For those nurses and Aboriginal health workers in rural and remote locations, travel assistance is also available. Scholarships can be awarded retrospectively for courses commenced from 1st July 2009.

Applicants must have a current practicing certificate issued by a nurse registration body in an Australian state or territory and be eligible to undertake the training or course applied for. Applicants must also be an Australian or New Zealand citizen currently residing in Australia. Applicants do not need to be an APNA member to apply.

Applications open on Friday 4 September 2009.

All eligible practice nurses are encouraged to apply online through the APNA website at www.apna.asn.au. Further information, application forms and guidelines are also available through the website or from the APNA office on 03 9614 7777 or Freecall 1300 303 184.

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The 2009 Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (for Practice Nurses)
The Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) together with the Australian Practice Nurses Association (APNA) have developed scholarship and postgraduate scholarship schemes for practice nurses. These scholarships are open to all nurses and Aboriginal health workers currently employed in the general practice setting.

About practice nursing
Nursing in general practice is currently the fastest growing area of nursing in Australia, experiencing a 63.7% growth over the past two years. Nurses have been in general practice for many years, however a combination of GP workforce shortages, as well as an increase in elderly and chronic disease patients, has seen the role of these nurses expand and develop in exciting new ways over the last six years. Practice nurses are now key members of the health team in almost 60% of general practices across Australia.

What is a practice nurse
A practice nurse is a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse who is employed by, or whose services are otherwise retained by, a general practice.

About APNA
APNA is the peak body for nurses in general practice with over 1,500 members and is growing at an increasing rate each month. We provide support, networking and education for our members and inform policy makers, researchers and others of the vital role of practice nurses.