

Filipino Migrants Forum

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This is the fourth of five parts of the submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration in the Federal Parliament. The last part will appear in the next issue.

In this issue, we will reproduce our submission on what we believe is the current situation for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for temporary residents who need skills assessment/recognition, with our recommendations.

Current situation:

Occupations in demand include Nurses, Medical Practitioners, Physiotherapists, Dentists, Veterinarians, Pharmacists and other health professionals.

Overseas registered Nurses, Veterinarians, Physiotherapists and Dentists have to undergo a long and costly process in order to obtain their overseas qualifications recognition which would enable them to apply for temporary working visas.

Temporary working visas for Pharmacist Assistants, Dental Assistants, Physiotherapy Assistants etc. are not available as these occupations are not in the list of occupations eligible for working visas.

In NSW, where assessment for registered Nurses seeking qualifications recognition appears to be the cheapest, a minimum of \$4600 for the 8-12 week assessment program is required to cover the tuition fee plus cost of living and travel expenses.

Issues:

We will discuss the case of registered Nurses in particular because of the long standing demand which has not been alleviated in the last five years.

1. Philippine educated nurses who have obtained work experience overseas in countries like the UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, or Libya, alongside Australian and US qualified Nurses, are still required to complete the overseas nurses assessment program.
2. In NSW, the intake at the College of Nursing for programs for assessment of Nurses with overseas qualifications is limited to 100-150 people per year. This is very minimal in relation to the reported demand of 5000 registered Nurses in NSW

3. Nurses who have completed their Bachelor in Nursing Degree conducted in the Philippines are not always eligible for assessment as a registered Nurse in New South Wales due to a change of the policy of the NSW Nurses Registration and Midwifery Board on 6 December 2001. Their qualifications are sometimes recommended for assessment only as an *enrolled* Nurse rather than as *registered* Nurse.
4. There is no independent, accessible and cost effective appeal system of skills recognition (Ombudsman type)
5. Those who are tasked with ensuring the proper implementation of registration policies are often members of a union (e.g. New South Wales Nurses Registration and Midwifery Board and New South Wales College of Nursing policies), who have the interest of their own union to protect.

Recommendations:

1. Temporary working visas

A remedial measure to fill in occupations in demand would be to grant temporary working visas to assistants in those professions (e.g. Pharmacist Assistants, Dental Assistants, and Physiotherapy Assistants etc) during which they should be allowed to undergo training and assessment while working towards their qualifications assessment and recognition.

2. Equal Opportunity Policy

An equal opportunity policy should be adopted in regard to Filipino Nurses who are *also* registered Nurses in the UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore and other countries so that these registered Nurses are automatically exempted from the mandatory assessment, by granting *similar exemptions even if they were educated in the Philippines*.

3. 'The Philippines Country Education Profile' (CEP)

The guidelines in 'The Philippines Country Education Profile' (CEP) stating that the level of education of certain Philippine educated Nurses who graduated from educational institutions classified as Section I and under certain circumstances, Section II is *comparable to Australian degree qualifications* (at pages 31 and 33) and that they are therefore *exempted* from the mandatory NSW College of Nursing assessment, should be followed.

4. Recognition of registered Nurses' qualifications

The New South Wales Nurses Registration Board should be directed to revert to its policy before 6 December 2001, that is, that Nurses who completed their Bachelors in Nursing Degree conducted at any educational institution in the Philippines are eligible for assessment as registered Nurses in New South Wales.

Given that they have all passed the national PRC Board Examinations, Nurses who have graduated from Section III or IV educational institutions should be recommended to undergo assessment as registered Nurses, not as enrolled Nurses.

5. Credit for clinical assessment

Those who have certain hospital work experience gained overseas, e.g. at least five years hospital work experience in the Philippines or at least three years experience overseas (that is, other than experience in the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Libya and other non-Commonwealth countries) should be recognised and given credit by being granted exemption from clinical assessment.

6. Increase the intake for the overseas qualification program at the NSW College of Nursing

In NSW, the intake for programs for assessment of Nurses with overseas qualifications should be at least 250 per year given that there is a reported demand of 5000 registered Nurses in NSW (which is on the increase) since this is the only recognised program other than the minimum one year university courses costing around \$16,000 in tuition fees plus cost of living expenses.

7. Pre- Registration Review

A Review Program to provide preparation for the Qualifying Exams or Theoretical Assessment should be conducted overseas. A self-study education package at a fee should also be made available.

8. Conduct of Qualifying Examinations and Clinical Orientation overseas

Where possible, two-hour objective theoretical assessments and perhaps also simulated clinical assessments should be conducted at the Australian Embassy in Manila (overseas post), to minimise the expenses and risk involved for applicants in undertaking qualification assessment programs in Australia, and to encourage the best Nurses to apply to work in Australia instead of the UK or USA which offer higher pay and higher foreign exchange rates.

9. Paid hands on training in Australia at enrolled Nurses' salary rates

The concept of the adaptation period in the United Kingdom should be followed, after which the applicant should be recommended for registration.

10. Independent, accessible and cost effective appeal system of skills recognition

An independent, accessible and cost effective appeal system should be established (Ombudsman type) to ensure the proper implementation of New South Wales Nurses Registration and Midwifery Board, and New South Wales College of Nursing policies.

11. Scholarships

In order to meet the demand for Nurses, there should be scholarships as well as other incentives given, for example, to the top 5% of the class or top 10% of those who have passed the Board exams conducted by the Philippine Professional Regulations Commission. While most of those with two years experience are expected to be working overseas by this time, this incentive would attract the best Nurses working in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya and Singapore, as it would help alleviate the high cost and risk involved in undertaking qualification assessment programs in Australia, and would ensure that the Nurses who have the best skills would be able to immigrate.

This information is of a general nature and should not be taken as authoritative legal advice for specific cases. The writer, Atty. Imelda Argel is a practising Filipino lawyer and a registered migration agent in Sydney, Australia. She is a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, the High Court of Australia, Attorney at law in the Philippines and in the State of New York, USA. Her Migration Agent Registration no. is 9682957. More information is available at www.iargel.com.au