Postgraduate clinical practice experience

Specialist nurse/midwifery education can be achieved at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or Masters levels. Postgraduate clinical education is linked with nurse specialist topics and the clinical placement needs are dictated by the needs of the nominated specialty.

Specialist clinical experience can be achieved by registered nurses within the nominated specialist clinical venue. The experience can be achieved through being employed in the area or by placement by the School as a supernumerary staff member.

All clinical specialties require minimum hours per week of practice within the specialist discipline in order that theory can be applied to practice. The amount of clinical practice required can be clarified by the topic coordinator of the clinical specialty topic and will vary depending on the specialty and specialty needs. For example, critical care requires a minimum 24 hours per week of practice within an approved level critical care department, throughout two semesters of the University calendar year. Many specialties will require shift work hours.

Flinders University uniform and ID badge (refer to earlier sections in this booklet) are required for students engaged in supernumerary placement where the clinical venue requires a uniform.

Postgraduate students are asked not to request leave from clinical experience during the semester period as absence may impact on learning needs. Students’ absence from clinical practice due to illness, injury or extenuating circumstances must be communicated to their clinical facilitator and/or specialty topic coordinator.
Teaching and learning strategies

In a similar way to undergraduate teaching and learning strategies, the postgraduate student is encouraged to learn using many and varied methods in order to develop the knowledge and practice capability to enable advanced practice in the chosen specialist field.

Of particular note is the design of the postgraduate clinical curriculum. The curriculum is encased within a collaborative relationship and was developed with our clinical partners. As such, the curriculum enables learning that is meaningful to the student and workplace because it incorporates concepts of evidence-based practice, critical thinking and clinical reasoning which provide life-long learning skills and advanced practice.

Clinical practice support

Clinical practice support for the postgraduate student is similar to and based on the various undergraduate models.

Facilitation involves teaching staff making visits to venues to help the student contextualise their learning as well as challenge their critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills in order to promote thinking and learning in action—this helps to make the learning process meaningful.

Teachers and specialist clinical staff are also able to work together in defining and resolving any learning difficulties early because there is an established relationship. The relationship ensures the teacher, student and specialist clinical staff are working together to mentor learning and development of the registered nurse to specialist nurse.

In some venues teaching staff are involved in patient care on a regular basis and/or they are active in research in the area. This active working relationship has additional benefits for students as they see the teacher involved in their specialty and participating in unit activities and as such is a role model.

Some clinical specialty topics consist of or include observational time in a specialty venue, rather than clinical practice involving direct patient care. Students should refer to learning outcomes for observational clinical time in relevant topics, and must ensure they understand how learning support will be provided.
Should a postgraduate student encounter learning difficulties in their clinical practice, these issues are managed collectively by the topic coordinator, clinical facilitator and the nominated clinical preceptor or mentor and the student. Clinical learning contracts are utilised in an effort to overcome specific learning difficulties. Clinical learning contracts are similar to those used in the undergraduate program but may vary depending on the needs of the individual specialty.

**Responsibilities of students**

Students in the postgraduate program are registered nurses and as such are expected to work within their scope of practice in accordance with the Nurses Board of their state or territory.

Students are expected to carry their current practising certificate at all times while on clinical placement. In addition, as students of the University, students are expected to adhere to rules and regulations (e.g. occupational health and safety, universal precautions and patient confidentiality) of the institution they are placed in or employed by, as well as the University.

Students enrolled in postgraduate specialty topics consisting of observational clinical time only are not permitted to work as registered nurses. During observational time students must be directly or indirectly supervised by a registered nurse, who will define the activities that may or may not be undertaken, and the learning activities available.

Information regarding University requirements can be found in the *Topic information/Topic details* booklet of the specialist clinical topics and within this booklet. Students should also be familiar with the University’s *Student-related policies and procedures manual*. 

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