

Frequently asked questions

September 2012

FAQ: Recency of practice

Background

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (the National Board) undertakes functions as set by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The National Board regulates the practice of nursing and midwifery in Australia, and one of its key roles is to protect the public by ensuring that only health practitioners who are suitably qualified to practise in a competent and ethical manner are registered.

In order to become registered, nurses and/or midwives have to meet the National Board's mandatory registration standards. Registered nurses and midwives are expected to practise within the relevant competency standards and decision-making frameworks.

1. What is 'recency of practice'?

'Recency of practice' means that a nurse or midwife has recent experience practising their profession and that their nursing or midwifery skills are current and up to date.

For an individual who is both a nurse and midwife, it means that they have recent experience practising *both* professions and that their nursing *and* midwifery skills are current and up to date.

Nursing and midwifery practice is constantly evolving, and it is vital that previously registered nurses and/or midwives returning to practice are competent and safe to provide nursing and/or midwifery care.

The introduction of the National Board *Recency of practice registration standard* (the Standard) established national recency of practice requirements for nurses and midwives. The Standard requires that a nurse and/or midwife (when seeking registration, endorsement of registration or renewal of registration) must have undertaken sufficient practice to demonstrate competence in their profession/s within the preceding five years.

The National Board has agreed to link an audit of nurses' and midwives' compliance with registration standards, including recency of practice, to the renewal of their registration. Auditing is to ensure that the registration standards are being met. Auditing is scheduled to commence for the renewal of registration period in 2013.

Auditing of nurses and midwives will be implemented following evaluation of a practitioner audit pilot running from October to December 2012 on renewal of registration within the pharmacy, optometry and chiropractic professions.

Outcomes of the practitioner audit pilot will inform the next steps for developing an audit framework and its subsequent rollout to other professions, including nursing and midwifery. The National Board will advise as soon as possible when the implementation of auditing of nurses and midwives will commence.

2. What is meant by 'practice'?

The National Board has defined 'practice' as:

'...any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a nurse or midwife ...practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes working in a direct non-clinical relationship with clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles, and any other roles that impact on safe, effective delivery of services in the profession and/or use of their professional skills'.

In order to become registered, nurses and/or midwives must meet the National Board's mandatory registration standards, including the requirements of the *Recency of practice registration standard*.

3. What sort of practice hours are acceptable over and above those defined in 'practice' above?

Practice hours are recognised if the evidence provided by the nurse and/or midwife demonstrates that they practised nursing and/or midwifery and that:

- a. the nurse or midwife held a valid registration with a nursing or midwifery regulatory authority in Australia (or one of the countries listed in the Standard) when the hours were worked
- b. the role involved the application of nursing and/or midwifery knowledge and skills in the relevant competency domains for their practice, or
- c. time was spent undertaking postgraduate education leading to an award or qualification that is relevant to the practice of nursing and/or midwifery.

4. What evidence do I need to provide to show that I meet the recency of practice requirements?

You need to provide evidence that you have practised for a period equivalent to a *minimum* of three months full time, within the past five years.

The types of evidence you can provide includes a service statement from your employer, pay slips, income statement for the year, and other documents showing the hours and dates that you worked.

The types of evidence that are accepted are at the discretion of the National Board.

5. Do the hours worked have to be continuous?

No, the hours do not need to be continuous and can be accumulated over the past five years. As long as they are equivalent to a minimum of three months full time, and the type of evidence you provide is accepted by the National Board, that is sufficient evidence.

6. If I am a registered nurse as well as a registered midwife, do I need to meet recency requirements for both professions?

Yes, you need to provide evidence showing that you have undertaken the required equivalent hours in both nursing and midwifery within the past five years. This means that you need to be able to demonstrate that you have practised the equivalent of three months full time in nursing **and** the equivalent of three months full time in midwifery, over the past five years.

However, if you consider an aspect of your work could provide evidence for both nursing and midwifery practice, you may make a case for that. An example of this could be caring for women and their babies after having a caesarean section.

7. If I am working overseas as a registered nurse or midwife are these hours acceptable evidence of recency of practice?

Yes. However, you need to provide the same level of evidence as required for practice undertaken in Australia.

8. What happens if I am unable to meet the recency of practice requirements?

If you have not accrued sufficient hours over the past five years, you need contact the AHPRA office in your state or territory to get advice about your individual circumstances.

Depending on that advice, you may need to submit an application for registration that will be assessed to determine whether you will be required to either successfully complete:

- a. supervised practice as approved by the National Board, or
- b. a National Board approved re-entry to practice program.

9. What if I am employed at the time of application for renewal but do not meet the three months recency of practice requirement?

If in the three months prior to renewal you have taken up employment, but have not completed the three months full-time equivalent recency of practice requirements in the past five years, you will be given a period of up to three months from the expiry date of your registration to meet the requirements.

At the time of your renewal you will need to provide evidence (as described in the answer to question 4 of these FAQs) to demonstrate the length of your practice to date, in order for the amount of extra practice you need to undertake to be determined.

During this time your application will remain in assessment¹ and your application will be monitored. At the end of this time you will be required to provide the relevant evidence to demonstrate that you meet the recency requirements. If you are unable to provide evidence at the end of this period you will be considered to have not met the standard and your registration will not be renewed.

10. Do I need to keep evidence of my recency of practice?

Yes, you should make sure to keep evidence of your practice for at least five years, in case you are selected for audit.

11. Do I need to submit evidence of my recency of practice to the National Board each year when I renew my registration?

No, you only need to sign a declaration to say that you have met the recency requirements. Evidence will only be requested if you are selected for audit. Remember to keep your evidence for at least five years in case you get selected for audit.

12. What if I have never practised since graduation and do not meet the recency standard?

If you do not meet the recency of practice registration standard, you will need to contact your local AHPRA office to get further advice. See the answer to question 8 of these FAQs for more information.

For more information

- Refer to the website, www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au
 - *Nursing and midwifery recency of practice registration standard*, published under the *Registration standards* tab
 - Read the competency standards, published under the *Codes, guidelines and statements* tab
 - Lodge and online enquiry from the *Contact us* page
- For registration enquiries call: 1300 419 495 (within Australia) +61 3 8708 9001 (overseas callers)

¹ Assessment means that your registration expiry date will remain unchanged on the public register until you meet the outstanding requirements.