

## policy

# Paediatric nursing in Europe: influencing policy and practice



### Abstract

The WHO European Health Report 2005 called for significant efforts from all countries to protect and promote children's health. Nurses across Europe have a major role to play in this effort but in many countries they lack the appropriate education and organisational support to make a meaningful contribution. A network of paediatric nursing associations in Europe was formed in 2003 to strengthen nurses' voices in child health policy and improve the potential of nurses to contribute to protecting and promoting the health of children and young people.

Based on a consensus definition of the European paediatric nurse, the Paediatric Nursing Associations of Europe has developed consensus position statements on issues such as regulation and educational preparation. These have been used to lobby at national levels with positive results such as new mechanisms for identifying paediatric nurses on some national nursing registers, legislation to protect the use of the title 'paediatric nurse' and consideration of the reintroduction of specific programmes at both pre and post registration level for preparation of paediatric nurses.

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**T**he most recent European Health Report (WHO 2005) focused on children, recognising that poor health and lifestyle choices in childhood can lead to ill health throughout life. The report concluded that the health status of children across Europe reflects a widening east-west gap, with 'large differences according to age, gender, geographical location and socioeconomic position, both within and between countries' (pIX).

The report states: 'The causes and rates of illness and death in children vary widely across the Region. In particular, eastern countries have higher morbidity and mortality from respiratory and infectious diseases, and injuries and poisoning... Children's disease patterns in western countries therefore include proportionately more NCDs (non-communicable diseases), such as asthma and allergies, diabetes, obesity and neuropsychiatric disorders' (WHO 2005 pIX).

WHO called for significant efforts from all countries to protect and promote children's health. Nurses across Europe have a major role to play in this effort but in many countries they lack the appropriate education and organisational support to make a meaningful contribution. This article reports on the development of a European network of paediatric nursing associations that was

established in 2003 to bring those organisations together to strengthen their voice in policy and improve the potential of paediatric nurses to contribute to protecting and promoting the health of children and young people. (The term 'paediatric nurse' is used rather than children's nurse as this term is more commonly understood across Europe.)

### Objectives of the network

The Paediatric Nursing Associations of Europe (PNAE) is the regional grouping of the International Association of Paediatric Nursing (IAPN) which was established in 1998. The international group had three main goals which were also adopted by PNAE. These were to:

- enhance the care of children and adolescents worldwide
- use the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child to promote and advocate for the health and development of children
- encourage communication between paediatric nurses to help further the care of all children.

In the four years since it was established, PNAE has grown substantially and now has 23 member countries. Although some countries do not yet have a national paediatric nursing association, an increasing number are establishing a group for

### Key words

- Paediatric nursing,
- Health policy
- Child health
- Nursing: profession

**Box 1** PNAE links with:

ICN - International Council of Nurses  
 IPA - International Pediatric Association  
 EFN - European Federation of Nurses  
 FePI - European Federation of Nursing Regulators  
 WHO - World Health Organization, European Region

paediatric nurses within their national nursing association. Through its activities PNAE seeks to ensure that children, young people and families across Europe are guaranteed the quality of nursing care they have a right to receive. Activities to date have included establishing a clear vision for paediatric nursing across Europe and informing and advising other European organisations on paediatric nursing issues (e.g. the European Federation of Nurses and the European Federation of Nursing Regulators).

There has been a major focus on promoting common standards in paediatric nursing practice and education and members are now working towards the free movement of paediatric nurses through recognition of differing educational preparations and professional registrations. PNAE recognised the need to define what a 'paediatric nurse is' and to address issues such as regulation and the educational preparation of paediatric nurses in Europe.

**Definition of a paediatric nurse**

PNAE members used the International Council of Nurses (ICN 1998) definition as the foundation for consensus on the definition of a paediatric nurse:

*A nurse who has successfully completed a recognised course of study and practice experience in the nursing care of infants, children and adolescents/young people.*

The 'core tasks' of paediatric nursing are also outlined and include:

- rights-based, holistic, child and family-centred care
- promotion of physical and mental health and well-being
- accident and disease prevention
- child protection
- care of infant, child and adolescent with: acute/chronic/life-threatening/limiting physical and mental conditions; disability/impairment (physical/intellectual/sensory) in all healthcare settings.

The overarching core task of the European paediatric nurse is to protect and to promote the rights and health of children, and provide care in specific/dedicated healthcare services to meet the needs of children and their families within hospitals and communities across Europe.

**Registration and regulation**

Children and young people have the right to be cared for by appropriately qualified and educated nursing staff. Their families/guardians also have

a right to know that the nurse who cares for their child is specifically educated and competent to do so. PNAE believes that the title 'paediatric nurse' should be used only by those 'legally authorised to practice the full scope of paediatric nursing'. Lobbying by members of PNAE in a unified way across Europe has yielded positive results. Several countries have now established specific mechanisms for identifying 'paediatric nurses' on their nursing register and legislation has been introduced to protect the use of the title 'paediatric nurse'.

**Educational preparation**

A survey by PNAE of European countries found wide variations in:

- the academic level of nurse education, for example, certificate, diploma, degree or masters level
- the nature of nurse education programmes preparing paediatric nurses for practice, and
- the outcome competencies of these programmes.

PNAE has now produced a position statement about the education of paediatric nurses and a competency framework. There was a firm belief among member associations that 'general/adult' orientated nurse education programmes are insufficient preparation for nurses to practise as paediatric nurses. The framework and position statement will, in due course, contribute to achieving mutual recognition and transferability for paediatric nurses as well as informing the review of and future development of paediatric nurse education programmes across Europe. As a result of PNAE activities several countries have been evaluating their current education programmes for the preparation of nurses and are beginning to reintroduce specific programmes at both pre and post registration level for paediatric nurses.

**Staffing levels**

Spring 2007 marked the beginning of a benchmarking exercise across Europe to establish the evidence base for a position statement about the minimum staffing requirements to ensure safe care. The findings of the benchmarking survey revealed variations but many similarities which are currently being used to draft a position statement for refinement and approval by PNAE members.

**Conclusion**

Benefits of international/European alliances have been well demonstrated by the initial outcomes of PNAE activity. We have raised the profile of paediatric nursing and children's healthcare in Europe and provided a basis for facilitating transferability of paediatric nursing qualifications across Europe. Forging formal links and the establishment of a network across Europe has enabled sharing of examples of good practice, developments and initiatives for the future may form a basis for facilitating focused research **PN**

Information about PNAE, copies of position statements and findings of surveys can be found at: [www.rcn.org.uk/development/communities/specialisms/children\\_and\\_young\\_people/forums/](http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/communities/specialisms/children_and_young_people/forums/)

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