



Canadian Association  
of Schools of Nursing

Association canadienne des  
écoles de sciences infirmières

## Position Statement

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### CASN Position Statement on Master's Level of Nursing

#### Background

Nurses provide care to influence health outcomes of individuals, families, communities and populations. CASN accepts the International Council Nurses statement that "advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, and education are also key nursing roles"<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore CASN recognizes that while baccalaureate nursing education programs are vital for preparing nurses for a general nursing education,<sup>2</sup> Master's level nursing education programs are necessary for fully integrating the scholarship of nursing that is embedded in practice, education, administration, research and policy. The Canadian Healthcare system benefits when the voices of advanced practice nurses are added to the interdisciplinary discourse on the necessity for healthcare renewal.

#### Position

At the Master's level, students build upon the knowledge and competencies acquired at the baccalaureate level. Emphasis is placed on developing the ability to analyze, critique, and use research and theory to further nursing practice. Provision is also made for examination of current issues in health care and the ethical values that influence decision-making. Core components of a Master's curriculum include definitive preparation designed to enable students to synthesize research, theory and practice at an advanced level. In addition to the core components the focus of Master's study may include the preparation of nurses with advanced leadership skills in: clinical practice (e.g. Nurse Practitioner, Clinical Nurse Specialists); nursing education (academic and healthcare institutions); administration (institutional, community and educational); health policy and nursing research. Master's programs encompass a *program continuum* that includes programs that require a master's thesis, programs that require a major project or practicum, and programs that are course based. Individual Master's programs may include both required and elective courses designed to prepare graduates to assume positions in advanced nursing practice, teaching, administration, policy development and/or to provide a foundation for doctoral study.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.icn.ch/definition.htm>

<sup>2</sup> CASN Position Statement on Baccalaureate Education and Baccalaureate Programs

## **Students**

In order to address the future needs of the Canadian health care system, to ensure qualified faculty for clinical instruction and to develop a strong pool of Master's prepared nurses for doctoral education, Canadian Master's programs must be creative in recruiting strong students. Efforts at recruiting for Master's study should begin with recruitment to undergraduate nursing programs. High school students contemplating nursing should be helped to recognize that, for some nurses, there is natural progression to a Master's degree. The message of natural progression to Master's study for academically strong students should also be discussed early and often throughout the undergraduate program.

Many Master's students will have been in the workforce prior to return to university and many will choose to combine part-time study with full-time work. Strategies need to be developed to decrease the sense of vulnerability these students experience when confronted with the dissonance that occurs when they are expert practitioners in one part of their day or week and are novice graduate students in another part of their day or week.

## **Targets**

In order to meet the needs created by the increased numbers of seats in baccalaureate nursing education, explicit predictions of the numbers of Master's prepared nurses required for clinical teaching and numbers of Master's prepared nurses who will go on to doctoral study are required. Targets should also be developed for Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurses Specialists, administrators (institutional and community), educators, and health policy specialists. Once target numbers are identified, strategies for educating university administrators, regional and/or provincial governments and other stakeholders about the relationship between high quality baccalaureate education and a cadre of well qualified faculty at the Master's and doctoral levels should be articulated so that targets can be met. Strategies should also be developed for educating stakeholders of the benefits of an appropriate mix of baccalaureate and Master's prepared nurses in the health care system.

## **Funding**

Nursing as a practice discipline has a different trajectory for education at an advanced level as compared to other disciplines, including other health care disciplines within the academy. CASN recognizes the need to address the requirement for increased numbers of funded graduate seats: for preparing nurse educators resulting from the increase in seats in baccalaureate programs; the anticipated increased demand for Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists; and the need for nurse administrators to deal with the increased complexity of health care and education.

Significant increases in funding are required to support Master's students. Funding for Master's programs needs to consider actual costs for sustaining current enrollments as well as to address seat expansion; appropriate ratio of funding for part-time students compared to full-time students; and increased financial support for students (e.g.

scholarships, bursaries, teaching assistantships, etc.). CASN recognizes that it will take a concerted unified effort of nurses to assist institutions and governments to accept that increasing the capacity of graduate programs in nursing is vital for sustaining undergraduate programs in nursing. Nursing is the largest discipline within the Canadian health care system and the funders need to recognize that the current financial support levels are insufficient to sustain long-term viability of the preparation of nurses who provide direct care. In addition, sufficient funding is required to prepare a cadre of Master's prepared nurses who are vital to healthcare renewal and to achieving optimal societal health.

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