Competence is the combination of demonstrated skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin safe effective and/or superior performance in a profession/occupational area. Continuing competence is the ability of nurses and midwives to demonstrate they have maintained their competence in their current area of practice.¹

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA), requires nurses and midwives to maintain competence in order to provide safe, quality nursing or midwifery care.

Nurses and midwives practice under the NMBA Professional Practice Framework (PPF). The Professional Practice Framework includes:

- National Competency Standards,
- National Decision Making Framework,
- Codes of Ethics, including:
  - Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia,
  - Code of Ethics for Midwives in Australia,
- Codes of Professional Conduct, including:
  - Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia,
  - Code of Professional Conduct for Midwives in Australia, and
- Registration Standards, including:
  - Recency of Practice,
  - Continuing Professional Development,
  - Criminal History,
  - Professional Indemnity Insurance Arrangements for Nurses,
  - Professional Indemnity Insurance Arrangements for Midwives,
  - English Language Skills,
  - Nurse Practitioner Endorsement,
  - Eligible Midwives,
  - Endorsement Scheduled Medicines for Registered Nurses and
  - Endorsement for Scheduled Medicines for Midwives.²

Nurses and midwives can only demonstrate competence where they are provided with an environment which facilitates effective, efficient and quality care. Factors which can negatively impact on demonstrating competence are:

- unrealistic performance expectations,
- poor physical layout of the work setting,
• staffing which is inadequate in number and inappropriate in skill level and mix,
• lack of supplies, services and other resources, including access to computers and the internet,
• unsafe practices of other health care professionals,
• lack of written policies or standards to provide direction and support for nursing and/or midwifery practice, or
• conflict between health professionals.

Self-assessment of competence is an ongoing process whereby nurses and midwives examine their practice against the National Competency Standards\(^3\) and the National Decision Making Framework required by the NMBA for registration.

Self-assessment should include reflection, critical incident analysis, peer review and evaluation of client/resident and patient outcomes. Peer review of nursing and midwifery competence, although not mandatory under the National Registration Standard, is an objective assessment of performance against the National Competency Standards for nurses or midwives.

**It is the position of the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation that:**

1. All nurses and midwives have a responsibility to provide high quality, safe and competent nursing and/or midwifery care to the community.

2. All nurses and midwives have a professional responsibility to maintain their competence and to have a contemporary knowledge and skill base in order to deliver safe nursing and/or midwifery care.

3. Individual nurses, midwives, professional organisations, the NMBA, employers, educational providers and governments share the responsibility to ensure the maintenance of professional practice standards.

4. Nurses and midwives may apply a process of regular self-assessment or peer review as the basis for determining their continuing competence to practice and identification of learning needs.

5. Nurses and midwives may base their self-assessment on a variety of methods to maintain competence and improve practice, including formal and informal learning; participation in and use of evidence based practice and research; other continuing professional development activities; and reflection on workplace performance appraisals.
6. Measures to achieve continuing competence may include, but should not be limited to: evaluation of professional practice against relevant professional standards; workplace performance appraisal; attendance at a relevant conference, seminar and/or continuing professional development sessions; relevant post graduate educational courses; maintenance of professional knowledge through professional literature and research; participation in mandatory education (such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation or medicines calculation); and membership of a professional and/or industrial organisation.

7. Assessment of nurses and midwives competence should only be conducted by nurses and midwives with similar or advanced clinical expertise in the practice setting in which the nurse or midwife is to be assessed.

8. The assessing of a nurse’s or midwife’s competence requires knowledge of the professional and registration standards and their context of practice and acknowledgement of the extent of experience the nurse or midwife has undertaken.

9. Nurses and midwives should demonstrate a commitment to continuing competence through life-long learning.

10. Nurses and midwives should seek quality educational experiences relevant to their area of practice or professional interest.

11. Employers should provide nurses and midwives with support (financial and/or time off) and access to learning opportunities in a range of settings including facilitating education in the workplace, online, and via other distance education methods.

12. Nurses and midwives should support each other in demonstrating and maintaining competence for nursing and midwifery practice.

13. Nurses and midwives who identify learning needs in their practice should be given the support to formulate a professional development plan in collaboration with their employer.

14. Nurses and midwives need to document continuing professional development activities in accordance with the requirements of the NMBAs, Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard. 4

15. The development of any standards to assess and audit the competence of nurses and midwives must include consultation with the profession and be consistent with any standards developed by professional representative bodies.
References:

1. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council. 2006. Continuing competence in nursing and midwifery. Position statement available at: http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/May_06_Continuing_Competence_in_Nursing_and_Midwifery.pdf. (this address will be updated when we find where this is now sited)


This position statement should be read in conjunction with the ANF positions statements:

- Management of nursing and midwifery services (2009)
- Resolution of nursing and midwifery practice concerns in the workplace (2009).