Date Introduced: 15 May 1985
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Hon. Neal Blewett, M.P., Minister for Health

Short Digest of Bill

Purpose

To provide Federal assistance to the States for the transfer of basic nurse education to Colleges of Advanced Education.

Background

Basic nurse education is principally a State function. There is no national standard for nurse education. The requirements for registration are fixed by the relevant State Authorities. The Federal Government performs the same function in the ACT. The vast majority of nurse education occurs in hospitals. Training occurs under an apprenticeship type method, with student nurses working in, and being paid by, the hospitals. The education also involves study days, with the hospitals generally being responsible for providing the formal education as well as practical training. Student experience is often limited to the one hospital, though the standard and range of education offered varies from one hospital to another. The first non-hospital courses commenced in 1974 but failed to attract many students from hospital education. Students attending non-hospital courses received no payment.

The Committee on Nurse Education and Training, chaired by Dr Sidney Sax, was established in 1977 and reported to Federal Parliament in 1978 (the Sax Report). The Committee was established to review the general question of nurse education and in particular what role, if any, Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE's) should play. The Sax Report recommended that nurse education remain principally hospital based, though it also recommended that the number of positions for nurse education at CAE's be increased to 2,200 by 1985.[1] (There were 461 such positions available at the time of the Sax Report). This would allow sufficient numbers for a study comparing hospital and CAE nurse education to be conducted. The Government's response to the
Sax Report was announced on 24 June 1980. While accepting most of the Sax Report's recommendations, the Government gave no commitment to financing an increase in CAE positions. It considered the 461 available positions sufficient for an evaluation study. However, the Government soon modified this policy and announced, in October 1980, that an additional 350 positions would be made available over the years 1982-84. This increase, combined with the filling up of the second and third year of courses newly established at the time of the Sax Report, led to approximately 1,200 positions being made available at CAE's in 1984. As there were approximately 18,000 nurses undertaking education in 1984, this meant that about 7% of nurses received their education at CAE's in 1984.[2]

The Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) was examining the transfer of nurse education to CAE's when, in November 1983, the NSW Minister for Health announced that from the beginning of 1985 all new nurse education would be undertaken at CAE's. The Minister estimated the cost to NSW would be $35m if the Commonwealth provided TEAS allowances for the students involved.[3] As part of this policy, approximately 2,100 students were enrolled in nursing diploma courses at 15 CAE's in February 1985.[4]

The CTEC's report on the transfer of nurse education to CAE's was presented to Parliament in May 1984 and formed part of the Report for 1985-87 Triennium. CTEC examined the performance of hospital and CAE educated nurses and concluded that on the small sample available:

No evidence has emerged which would provide a basis for suggesting performance of nurses trained in colleges of advanced education is superior to that of hospital-trained nurses. Evaluations to date have reached the general conclusion that on the evidence available there were no significant differences in performance between the two groups in their first year of practice as registered nurses.[5]

As well, CTEC was concerned about the cost of the transfer of nurse education to CAE's. It accepted a submission from a joint CTEC/Department of Health Working Party that a full transfer of nursing education to CAE's would involve an additional $95m per year in the education budget plus capital and equipment costs.[6] As a result of these conclusions, CTEC recommended that the Government should remain within the confines suggested by the Sax Report[7] (i.e. that 2,200 CAE positions be made available) in the 1985-87 triennium.
Against the background of the NSW's government's decision to transfer nurse education to CAE's, together with representation from the other States that they intend to move to CAE education and the rejection of CTEC's recommendations by nursing organisations, the Government established an Inter-Departmental Committee to consider the rate of transfer to CAE's. The Committee concluded: '... it is the consensus amongst health authorities that existing nurse education programs do not adequately meet the needs for an appropriately skilled nursing workforce'.[8] Furthermore, the Committee stated that the need to improve the quality of nurse education resulted from '... increased emphasis on technology; increased complexity in drugs and medicine; the trend to shorten hospital stays, focusing hospital care on the acutely ill; and an increased demand for community nursing'.[9] The Committee also noted the International Labour Organisation's Recommendation 157 which states that 'where appropriate, basic nursing education should be conducted in educational institutions at a level similar to that of comparable professional groups'.[10] While noting these reasons in favour of a transfer to CAE based nurse education the Committee had reservations about the timing of a full transfer to CAE's, and concluded that a full transfer could not occur without major disruption to the supply of nurses and the CAE system before 1993, at the earliest.[11]

On 24 August 1984, the Government announced its support for the full transfer to CAE's, with the last intake into hospital based courses to occur in 1990.

Outline

The Bill will apply for the years 1985-1993. It will enable the Minister to enter into agreements with State Ministers under which the Commonwealth will provide assistance for the establishment and operation of basic nurse education at CAE's.

Main Provisions

Clause 4 of the Bill allows the Minister to enter into agreements and specifies conditions that grants are to be subject to namely, the money must be forwarded to CAE's which undertake nurse education, and the State concerned must ensure that the number of students enrolled does not fall below the number determined by the Minister (sub-clause 4(3)). As well, if the State fails to perform any negotiated conditions, the grant is repayable. Sub-clause 4(4) specifies the maximum amounts payable under the Bill - $1.62m in 1985, $4.43m in 1986 and $8.2m in subsequent years to 1993.
Clause 5 states that assistance is to be paid at such times and in such amounts as directed by the Minister for Finance.

Clause 6 allows the Minister to make advances to the States. Clause 9 requires the Minister to report to Parliament, as soon as practicable, after the end of each year.

Remarks

The Minister has estimated that the cost on full transfer will be $29.5m (at June 1985 prices) for the 1993 year. As well, there will be an increase in TEAS payments, which are estimated to be $2.5m in 1985, and will increase further as a greater number of nurses become involved in full-time education.[12]

For further information, if required, contact:

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References

3. ibid., p.132.
6. ibid., Volume 1, p.105.
7. ibid., p.106.
9. ibid., p.10.
10. ibid., p.12.
11. ibid., p.28.