St Vincent’s Private Hospital, Sydney (SVPHS) has a well-established new graduate program that aims to educate and support new graduate nurses to develop confidence, professionalism, expertise and excellent clinical skills. It provides experience in a diverse and challenging range of specialty nursing environments and has a strong commitment to excellence, a culture of enquiry, research and best practice.

The program is structured to provide new graduate nurses with 12 months clinical experience on either the patient care levels of the hospital or surgical services with six-month rotations within the two clinical areas. For the duration of each of their two ‘rotations’, graduates buddy with a preceptor, as well as being supported by a clinical nurse educator on the unit.

Structured, yet flexible, the course is built on an enabling framework to support transition. This is achieved through orientation, study days, assessment of core and specialty competencies, ongoing support and a variety of clinical experiences. The program provides graduates with a comprehensive orientation to the hospital and clinical areas during an initial supernumerary period.

All graduates are assigned a preceptor to facilitate their orientation and competency development. Graduates are also provided with after-hours educational support for a period of time in the evenings and on their night duty rotation.

In order to complete the competency based graduate program successfully, the new graduate nurses must complete a set of 18 core competencies as well as specialty competencies specific to the relevant clinical area; set performance objectives for each rotation; written reflections on their performance; participate in a mandatory set of study days; present a viva voce case study; and document all of their evidence in a professional portfolio.

The Bachelor of Nursing Clinical Honours (Transition to Practice) Program is offered by the University of Tasmania’s School of Nursing and Midwifery (UTas SNM), in collaboration with healthcare partners including St Vincent’s Private Hospital Sydney. Existing aspects of the hospital’s graduate programs are embedded into the overall structure, content and assessment, and then extended to reach the appropriate level of a tertiary award. SVPHS was the first organisation to partner with UTas SNM to progress this innovative hybrid course, specifically designed for graduate registered nurses.

To this end, the program fully incorporates and enhances the SVPHS New Graduate Competency Based program. Unlike the traditional honours which, through the provision of research training, sets the graduate on a research pathway, the Clinical Honours is focused on the development of clinical excellence, patient safety and retaining graduate nurses in practice. Quality and safety patient care, building graduate support, strengthening and extending the use of evidence-based practice are the key
priorities of the program with the production of a substantial evidence-based professional portfolio as the major cumulative piece of work. The course is consistent with the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework Level 8 honours specifications. Graduates must apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well-developed judgement, adaptability and responsibility within the professional practice framework of the registered nurse in Australia.

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By SVPHS Nursing Education Department