



Call to give nurses larger role in general practice

By Natasha Rudra

An Australian National University researcher says nurses should play a bigger role in GP surgeries and Australia must train nurses to work specifically in general practice.

Associate Professor Rhian Parker, from the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, has co-written a study on practice nursing published this week in the journal *BMC Nursing*.

She said Australia needed to develop national training standards and accreditation to give nurses a career path in general practice or primary health care.

Australia was failing to train nurses for general practice work, training them for acute care work or hospitals instead.

"There's good international evidence from across developed countries that if you

have a very robust primary health care system then you spend less on secondary care which is much more expensive. Unfortunately, what we are doing in Australia is training nurses for the hospital sector, we aren't training them for primary care," she said.

Professor Parker said Britain, where practice nurses were widespread, had developed proper career paths for nurses to work in surgeries.

"They've also rejigged the undergraduate curriculum to some extent to teach nurses more primary care and prevention so that they are prepared for a career in the primary care sector."

Professor Parker said the Australian Medical Association, which represents doctors, had a puzzling attitude to nurses and described the organisation as protectionist.

"Last year, [former AMA

president] Rosanna Capolingua said on radio – and I quote – that nurses would be dangerous. The evidence is completely the opposite," she said.

But AMA vice-president Steve Hambleton said the association was in fact supportive of practice nurses and was hampered by a restrictive list of rebates for practice nursing work.

"We've got some highly trained nurses working in general practice alongside the nurse and that helps the doctor work more efficiently. So we'd encourage the Government to increase subsidies for practice nurses right across the board," he said.

"I think the AMA has looked upon this as a very good collaborative model, it's already in existence."

Dr Hambleton, a GP, said he had employed practice nurses at his surgery for 21 years.