

The job evaluation review committee is an important way of ensuring senior nurse positions in district health boards are properly paid.

By organiser Deb Chappell

The acronym JERC probably means little to many readers, but it's an important one, particularly for senior nurses. To understand what JERC – the job evaluation review committee – is and how and why it operates, we first need to understand some of NZNO's industrial history.

In 2004, after the major Fair Pay campaign, NZNO achieved its first district health board (DHB) multi-employer collective agreement (MECA). This was made possible under the Employment Relations Act (ERA) 2000, which replaced the Employment Contracts Act (ECA). The ECA, introduced in 1991, destroyed the ability to negotiate national awards and led to the proliferation of regional and workplace-based employment contracts. The ECA led to the dismantling of the national award covering public health sector nurses, along with many others.

Achieving this first national MECA was a complex process that involved bringing together regional DHB-based agreements. These regional agreements often did not cover those in senior nurse positions. The coverage of senior nurses within employment contracts had been removed under the ECA. These members were either on individual employment contracts, which were inconsistent, or site-specific senior nurses' collective employment contracts.

National consistency

Part of the process of achieving the first national MECA was an agreement between NZNO and the DHBs to attempt to get national consistency in senior nurse job descriptions (JDs) and to have these jobs sized or evaluated.

The parties to that first MECA agreed to use the COMPERS tool for job evaluation. There were a number of competing job evaluation systems in the early

Ensuring senior nurses are paid correctly

1990s and 2000s The COMPERS tool was prevalent in the DHB sector.

An initial evaluation of senior nurses' job descriptions was done, using examples from all DHBs. An agreed structure for the salary scale was completed. The initial differential between the registered nurse (RN) step 5 and senior nurse grade 2 reflected the fact there was no professional development recognition programme for senior nurses. Subsequently, it was established no designated senior nurse job description was at grade 1 and this grade has never been used.

Job titles were also agreed on and included in the 2007 MECA negotiations. These titles, along with descriptors that described the responsibilities involved in the role, are still used now.

The JERC is the means by which senior nurses can have their roles evaluated. The committee is made up of representatives from Technical Advisory Services (TAS), formerly DHB Shared Services, and NZNO. A COMPERS expert attends each JERC meeting.

Each senior nurse position is scoped and scored – evaluated – on a range of factors. Each individual responsibility of a senior nurse role, as expressed in the JD, eg whether the position has a budget or how many staff the position manages, is assigned a "weighting" or score. The total score for the position is then put through the COMPERS tool, which automatically calculates where that position should be on the NZNO/DHB MECA senior nurses' pay scale.

Once the position has been evaluated in this way, it is entered into a database of senior nurse positions, which both the NZNO and TAS representatives on the JERC hold. All DHBs have copies of all

the senior nurse roles that have been evaluated.

Every JD for a senior nurse role in all DHBs should have gone through this process at least once. But DHBs often create new roles with new JDs, and then appoint nurses to the new roles for a trial period and decide where the new roles should sit on the senior nurse pay scale. That is not the correct process – all new senior nurse positions should go through the JERC process.

Also, DHBs sometimes disestablish senior nurse roles and replace them with similar roles on the same pay grade, but which have far more and far greater responsibilities and may be impossible to do because of this. Asking to have

the JD for the bigger role evaluated by the JERC to ensure it is placed at the correct grade on the pay scale is one way of challenging this practice.

Where a totally new designated senior nursing or midwifery role is created, outside current titles and descriptors, it must be referred to the JERC for evaluation.

If a position that has previously been evaluated grows and/or changes, the person in the role can apply to the JERC to have another look at it. If a nurse wants to apply to the JERC to review their role, it is important they seek advice and support from an NZNO delegate, organiser or professional nursing adviser. NZNO and the DHB have to sign off any application to the JERC.

The JERC is an integral part of the MECA and to not adhere to it, is a breach of the MECA. What NZNO and DHBs have agreed to regarding the JERC process is included in Appendix 1C of the latest MECA.

The JERC process is an important way of valuing nurses, by ensuring the roles and responsibilities of senior nurse positions are paid appropriately. •



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