

Filipino Migrants Forum

CAN FILIPINO NURSES OBTAIN WORKING VISA OR PERMANENT RESIDENCE IN AUSTRALIA?

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The government has recently announced its intention to hire 2,500 registered nurses. It appears that it is looking to facilitating the entry of Philippine registered nurses through government to government negotiations.

While this is a most welcome move, in practice it is easier said than done. For this to happen, Federal and State policy and legislation must be synchronised. The State nurses registration authority such as the NSW Nursing Board and the competence assessment body such as NSW College of Nursing must change their assessment process and registration requirements without lowering their standards to make it more affordable for Filipino nurses to undergo the assessment and registration process. It has been reported by the NSW Nursing Board that only about 60% of Filipino nurses who have undergone the assessment at the NSW College of Nursing from 1992 to 2001 have passed and therefore something must be done to make it less risky.

Before 1 July 2001, we have assisted many Filipino nurses in obtaining four year working visas as assistant nurses (pending NSW registration) in New South Wales. The processing time was typically two to three months from time of application lodgement with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. There has been a high level of satisfaction within both employers and the sponsored employees with those we placed to date. Many who started to work as assistant nurses are now working as either enrolled nurse or registered nurse. Some of them have now obtained permanent residence.

While we continue to successfully assist Filipino nurses obtain working visas and permanent residence, the process has become long and winding. A serious constraint to the employment of Filipino nurses has arisen as a result of changes to the Migration Regulations which took effect on 1 July 2001. After this date, Philippine educated registered nurses have been required to register with the nurses' registration authority of a State or Territories of Australia before they can be granted a *permanent* resident visa with the right to work. They can be granted a *temporary* visa with permit to work, only after they become either a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse in Australia.

An enrolled nurse is one who undertakes a nursing course, but has not obtained a Bachelors Degree in Nursing. The Philippines does not have enrolled nurses. An enrolled nurse works under the supervision of a registered nurse and has a higher rank and pay than an Assistant nurse.

A registered nurse is one who has completed a Bachelors Degree in Nursing in an Australian institution or who has obtained overseas qualification and has registered with a nurses registration authority in any of the States or Territories of Australia,

either after *passing* a nursing test or nursing competency assessment or has been *exempt* from such assessment.

As a general rule, Filipino nurses are first required to pass an English Test and Nursing Theoretical and Clinical Test (usually referred to as Pre- Enrolment Assessment or Pre-Qualification Registration Assessment) before they can obtain enrolment or registration in any of the States or Territories of Australia and qualify as enrolled nurse or registered nurse.

Filipino nurses have been having difficulty in passing the English test with the required pass mark of 7 out of 9 in the academic module of the IELTS due to lack of exposure to Australian English idiom being different from the American English. For this reason, I have commissioned an Australian English educator to conduct a one month IELTS preparation course to be held in Manila to assist applicants in passing this first hurdle.

Unlike nurses whose education and initial nursing registration were obtained in UK, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe and USA who are exempted from the English test and nursing test, those educated in the Philippines are not so automatically exempted in New South Wales even if they have worked as registered nurse in those countries.

Nurses registration authority in all the States or Territories of Australia other than in New South Wales usually recommend Philippine educated nurses for nursing assessment as registered nurse, after passing the English test. However, the NSW Nurses Registration Board will usually recommend a Philippine registered nurse for assessment as only as enrolled nurse, instead of as registered nurse, if the school of nursing from which the applicant graduated is not listed in The Philippines Country Education Profile, unless work experience is assessed as being suitable to complement Philippine education.

This is notwithstanding that the education for the award of all Bachelors in Nursing Degree in the Philippines are standardised by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) conducted nursing board examinations.

Indeed, the hiring of Filipino nurses in the immediate future is possible if the New South Wales government would initial implementation of streamlined Skills Assessment Process for Philippine educated Registered Nurses. Resolutions to this effect were passed at the 7th NATIONAL CONFERENCE of the Filipino Communities Council of Australia (FILCCA) held on 1-3 November 2002 at Mercure Resort Hotel, Gold Coast Queensland. Relevant excerpts are quoted as follows:

1. Conducting a two-hour objective test as theoretical assessment to be conducted at the overseas post (Australian Embassy in Manila);
2. Providing a Clinical Traineeship in Australia

After, the candidate passes the theoretical assessment, hands on training instead of clinical assessment, this to be paid at enrolled nurse salary rate and conducted in Australia. It could be similar in concept to the adaptation period

in the United Kingdom and made available, for a period of six months extendable to twelve months until the candidate is ready for registration; DIMIA to issue the appropriate visa for one year;

3. Granting exemption from clinical assessment and eligibility for a one year temporary registration to Philippine registered nurses who have at least two years hospital work experience in countries where they work on equal footing with Australian registered nurses eg. Saudi Arabia; DIMIA to grant one year working visa in such cases.
4. Granting exemption from pre-registration assessment, to Philippine registered nurses who are *also* registered nurses in the UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong or Singapore similar to registered nurses educated in these countries who are automatically exempted from the mandatory pre-registration assessment.

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Readers of the Philippine Community Herald Newspaper are invited to send their comments in support or against to “The President, Filipino Migrants Forum” c/o Imelda Argel & Associates, Solicitors & Attorneys, by email at info@iargel.com.au or by fax at (+612) 9699 3210 or by post to Suite 41, Ground Floor, 61-89 Buckingham St. SURRY HILLS NSW 2010.

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