

PROFESSIONAL NURSING PRACTICE

FACT SHEET SERIES



Nursing Practice Continuum

Nursing practice occurs along a continuum from beginning to advanced practice, and across areas from generalist to specialist practice. All professional licensed nurses, regardless of their level of education and qualifications and from entry to practice as a new graduate or at the peak of the clinical pathway as a nurse practitioner, are engaged in the practice of nursing.

Beginning practice

Beginning practitioners are prepared for entry to practice as safe, competent and ethical practitioners on completion of their initial education programs, which must be approved by the relevant nurse and midwife regulatory authority (NMRA). These programs, which prepare individuals for enrolment or registration as a nurse or authorisation as a nurse practitioner must ensure that graduates are able to demonstrate achievement of the national competency standards required for registration or enrolment as a nurse or authorisation as a nurse practitioner.

The national competency standards outline the knowledge, skills, judgement, values and attributes required by the RN, EN or NP to practise safely on entry to practice¹. They are used to assess whether a nurse's performance is sufficient to obtain, and retain, a licence to practise in Australia and form the basis for nurses to assess their own competence.

The standards are used by NMRAs as part of annual licence renewal processes, to assess the competence and performance of nurses educated overseas as well as nurses returning to the workforce after a break in service. They are also used to assess nurses involved in professional conduct matters.

The national core competency standards are the basis on which nurses build their practice and integrate their experience and knowledge to move along the continuum from novice as a beginning practitioner to expert as an advanced practitioner.

Beginning practitioners include all nurses on entry to practice; that is both newly graduated nurses and more experienced nurses who are starting practice in a specialist or new field.

¹ ANMC, 2002, National Competency Standards for the Enrolled Nurse, available online at:

<http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/Publications/Competency%20standards%20EN.pdf>

ANMC, 2005, National Competency Standards for the Registered Nurse, available online at:

<http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/Publications/Competency%20standards%20RN.pdf>

ANMC, 2006, National Competency Standards for the Nurse Practitioner, available online at:

<http://www.anmc.org.au/docs/Publications/Competency%20Standards%20for%20the%20Nurse%20Practitioner.pdf>

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Advanced practice

Advanced practice by registered nurses is characterised by greater and increasing complexity, where the nurse demonstrates more effective integration of theory, practice and experience accompanied by increasing degrees of autonomy in professional judgements and interventions. It is enabled by education, experience and competence development.

Advanced enrolled nurse practice is also characterised by greater and increasing complexity within the framework of the enrolled nurse's knowledge and skills. It is context specific and is enabled by experience, further education and delegation from a registered nurse and/or authorisation by an NMRA or employer.

Areas of practice

Initial nursing education prepares registered and enrolled nurses for generalist practice, which encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of nursing activities. It is directed towards the diversity of the community and the varying health needs of individuals. It takes place in a wide range of health care settings and is reflective of a broad range of knowledge, experience and skills. Although generalist practice is the practice for which nurses are initially educated, it may occur at any point on a continuum from beginning to expert practice.

Specialist practice is a focus on one field of nursing practice or health care that encompasses a level of knowledge and skill in a particular aspect of nursing greater than that acquired during initial nursing education. It builds on the base of generalist preparation and is directed towards a defined population or defined area of activity. Specialist practice may also occur at any point on a continuum from beginning to expert practice.

Many specialty nursing groups have developed competency standards to guide the practice of qualified practitioners in specialist areas. Unlike the national competency standards for RN, EN and NP, the status and authority of these guidelines and standards are uncertain. Currently, states and territories employ a range of legislative and regulatory approaches to specialist practice; this has resulted in inconsistency in the nursing specialties that are regulated and the mechanisms that are used to do this. It is envisaged that the implementation of national registration will provide increased clarity and consistency in regulatory approaches to specialist practice.