Policy Statement

RCN's position on advanced nursing practice

Royal College of Nursing

What is the RCN's position on advanced nursing practice?

Nurses are, increasingly extending their scope of practice well beyond initial registration in all healthcare settings. In areas such as general practice and community health, acute care, sexual health and mental health, nurses are now commonly working at an advanced practice level. Since 1980, the RCN has actively promoted advanced practice across a wide variety of health care settings in order to prevent disease and improve the health outcomes of diverse client groups.

In line with UK, European and international literature, as well as work arising from the UK Modernising Nursing Careers initiative, the RCN defines advanced nursing practice as a level of practice rather than a role or job title. Advanced level nursing practice both builds on and adds to the set of competences common to all registered nurses.

The RCN believes that there are compelling grounds for the regulation and standardisation at advanced levels of nursing practice for patient safety and public protection. The RCN believes that such annotation should be subject to revalidation in the same way and at the same time as revalidation of professional registration. By doing this patients will be able to know that if a nurse caring for them says they are working at an advanced level they can check a nurses PIN and also see the annotation which confirms this.

This is also important for nurses in terms of career pathways and professional development.

The RCN believes that advance nursing practice should be linked to validation and be subject to revalidation– enabling patients and service users to verify that the nurse caring for them is competent to practise at an advanced level, and understand what this means for them.

A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken around advance nursing practice which the RCN believes provides a solid foundation for further developments.

In particular, there is a UK-wide agreed standard for advanced nursing practice which links to a set of competences and transferable skills that can be used across generalist and specialist health care contexts. These competences are about:

- providing safe, effective person-centred care directly to patients/clients at an advanced level
- developing the care context (systems of care) to enable safe, effective person-centred care to be sustained by others
- providing terminology which is understood across all the health professions.

The RCN's competences for advanced nurse practitioners have been mapped against the Knowledge and Skills Framework and are linked to the NHS Career Framework. They have been endorsed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

"The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies"

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The competences were devised and researched collaboratively with higher education institutions (HEIs), professional organisations and service providers. They have standardised clinical outcomes and are a tool that HEIs can use to map and validate their curriculum outcomes as well as audit fitness to practice at this level. They also inform the RCN accreditation of advanced nurse practitioner programmes being run by a number of HEIs.

The RCN Accreditation Unit accredits advanced nurse practitioner programmes in HEIs against 15 standards focussing specifically on assuring quality of provision and standards of practice for graduates.

The RCN is also developing its own tools for recording evidence against advanced practice competences – for example, the RCN Learning Zone e-portfolio. This portfolio will be able to help individuals:

- contribute evidence towards professional and academic accreditation
- demonstrate ongoing maintenance of competence
- demonstrate readiness for career progression
- demonstrate continuing professional development for on-going registration.

References

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