

# UK Career Framework for Pain Nurses

Level Six

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE



**THE BRITISH  
PAIN SOCIETY**  
EXPERTISE WHERE IT MATTERS



Pain Nurse Network

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the RCN Pain and Palliative Care Forum for its support in developing this document and to the project team: Martin Galligan (Project Lead), Julie Gregory (Forum Chair), Karin Cannons, Sue Jenkins, Zoe Thomson, Siobhan Jones and Niamh Molloy.

Thanks also to those that took part in the consultation and review of the career framework – without their comments and insights we would not have been able to complete this project: Felicia Cox, Dr Donna Brown, Ofrah Muflahi, Adebukola Lawal, Laserina O'Connor, Emma Davies, Christine Waters, Geinor Bean and Dr Helen Makins.

We would also like to say a special thank you to Erica Gleeson and the New Zealand Pain Society, upon which the original Pain Knowledge and Skills framework was based. Thank you for your continued support in the design and development of this framework.

---

This document has been designed in collaboration with our members to ensure it meets most accessibility standards. However, if this does not fit your requirements, please contact [corporate.communications@rcn.org.uk](mailto:corporate.communications@rcn.org.uk)

## **RCN Legal Disclaimer**

This publication contains information, advice and guidance to help members of the RCN. It is intended for use within the UK but readers are advised that practices may vary in each country and outside the UK. The information in this booklet has been compiled from professional sources, but its accuracy is not guaranteed. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the RCN provides accurate and expert information and guidance, it is impossible to predict all the circumstances in which it may be used. Accordingly, the RCN shall not be liable to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by what is contained in or left out of this website information and guidance.

Published by the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN

© 2021 Royal College of Nursing. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the Publishers. This publication may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by ways of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without the prior consent of the Publishers.

# Contents

Level Six.....	4
Domain One: Recognition of pain.....	5
Domain Two: Assessment of pain .....	6
Domain Three: Treatment – physical strategies to manage pain.....	7
Domain Three: Treatment – self management strategies .....	8
Domain Three: Treatment – use of pharmacological strategies .....	9
Domain Three: Treatment – interventional strategies.....	10
Domain Four: Service development .....	11
Domain Five: Pain management in specialist groups.....	12

## Level Six

This document has been designed to be used **in combination with** the appropriate standards / competency assessment framework, for example, for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

This document should be used as evidence for your own practice development and can be used as part of a personal development plan or as part of professional body revalidation.

Those working at level 6 will have obtained the knowledge and skills as outlined in the previous levels and this is a natural progression in their development.

<b>Example role title:</b>	Associate/junior/trainee specialist practitioner i.e. clinical nurse specialist  Senior health care professional i.e. senior staff nurse, junior charge nurse
<b>Desirable Qualification:</b>	Completion of degree in health care discipline; completion or undertaking pain-related module.
<b>Role outline:</b>	This professional works alongside the experienced level 7 professional in a development role. They have a critical understanding of theoretical and practical knowledge within pain management, usually through a pain management specific course. They have added responsibilities such as supporting or providing training to non-specialist pain professionals within their areas.

# Domain One: Recognition of pain

This aspect of care examines definitions of pain, its anatomy and physiology, psychological, emotional, spiritual and social aspects of pain.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the biopsychosocial model of pain and relationship to pain behaviours.</li> <li>2. Demonstrates knowledge of the pathophysiology and psychology of acute, chronic and cancer pain and of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nociceptive pain</li> <li>• neuropathic pain</li> <li>• visceral pain</li> <li>• somatic pain</li> <li>• central sensitisation</li> <li>• nociplastic pain.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Discusses the concept of pain as a whole and the implications for practice that involves:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sensation</li> <li>• emotion</li> <li>• cognition</li> <li>• spiritual</li> <li>• social, cultural and environmental factors.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Discusses the potential adverse physiological and psychological effects of acute, persistent and cancer-related pain from the perspective of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cardiovascular and respiratory systems</li> <li>• gastrointestinal and genitourinary systems</li> <li>• metabolic</li> <li>• neuroendocrine systems</li> <li>• neurological and central nervous system.</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Discusses these in the context of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wind-up (hyperalgesia and allodynia)</li> <li>• mood</li> <li>• activities of daily living (ADLs).</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Assesses and informs the patient and family's knowledge/understanding of their pain.</li> <li>7. Specifically adapts approach to patients according to the characteristics of their pain when performing observations and assessments when planning treatment.</li> <li>8. Actions specific investigations which may aid diagnosis of pain.</li> <li>9. Accurately documents and communicate data/findings with IDT and other health personnel.</li> </ol>

## Domain Two: Assessment of pain

This aspect of care outlines how pain can be assessed, measured and communicated.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates knowledge of the rationale for, and barriers to, assessment and evaluation of pain from the perspective of health professionals, patient, family members and the general public.</li> <li>2. Performs a focused physical assessment to identify the location and affected areas of pain.</li> <li>3. Uses valid and reliable tools for the population to assess and measure pain and function. Assesses the impact of interventions on pain and function.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Demonstrates proficiency in the use of appropriate frameworks/tools for special populations as required and relevant to practice for the assessment of pain.</li> <li>5. Undertakes a comprehensive pain history to gather health data and to inform nursing diagnosis across a range of complex pain presentations. Within the health history identifies actual or potential for pain-related anxiety, depression, catastrophising, fear avoidance behaviour, persistent pain, medication misuse/abuse, self-harm and abuse.</li> <li>6. Assesses the patient/family's beliefs about pain, coping strategies, expectations, management, preferences, treatment goals, knowledge of their condition and its likely cause or contributing factors and their role in their pain management.</li> <li>7. Have an awareness of the wider impact of other long-term conditions on the patient's wellbeing and assess the impact this might have on their pain.</li> </ol>

# Domain Three: Treatment – physical strategies to manage pain

This aspect of care outlines the importance of physical strategies to improve and maintain function in acute and persistent pain.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discusses, utilises and teaches patients and the interdisciplinary team why improving and maintaining function is important in pain management in relation to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physiological</li> <li>• pathological</li> <li>• psychological.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Recognises the effects of unrelieved pain.</li> <li>3. Demonstrates and teaches an in-depth knowledge on physical strategies above and:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acupuncture</li> <li>• biofeedback</li> <li>• other rehabilitation approaches.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Utilises assessment to provide an appropriate pain management plan.</li> <li>5. Discusses the characteristics between capacity and function in relation to physiological and psychological attributes.</li> <li>6. In partnership with patients and other disciplines makes sound decisions that are ethically based in the interest of patients in the absence of previous experience or protocols.</li> <li>7. Demonstrates ability to work within sphere of own practice.</li> <li>8. Demonstrates a high level of knowledge of safeguarding issues for patient and patient information.</li> <li>9. Supports junior staff members in their knowledge and understanding of physical strategies.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Utilises assessment to provide an appropriate pain management plan. Demonstrates where best practice and evidence base has been applied to clinical practice or in-depth knowledge of role and a wide variety of physical strategies for the management of pain.</li> <li>11. Exhibits ways of engaging and empowering patients in their utilisation of physical strategies and ensure a patient-centred approach is taken when formulating a management plan.</li> <li>12. Acts as a resource and promotes the benefits of interdisciplinary team collaboration.</li> <li>13. In partnership with patients and other disciplines, makes sound decisions that are ethically based in the interest of patients in the absence of previous experience or protocols.</li> <li>14. Supports junior staff members and takes an active role in their supervision and education.</li> </ol>

## Domain Three: Treatment – self management strategies

This domain describes how the nursing team contributes to enabling patients to engage with self-management strategies for managing acute and chronic pain.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates knowledge of the rationale for, and barriers to success in, using self-management techniques, from the perspective of health care professionals, patient, family and general public.</li> <li>2. Demonstrates knowledge by using tools and approaches that support shared decision making for self-management.</li> <li>3. Has awareness of the variety of online resources and patient advocacy groups in relation to self-management and can signpost patients to these resources.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Uses evidence-based principles to improve practice.</li> <li>5. Communicates effectively to enable patients to assess their needs and develop and gain confidence to self-manage.</li> <li>6. Aware of own values and beliefs and can put the patient’s own values and beliefs at the centre of supporting self-management.</li> <li>7. Assesses the patient/family’s beliefs about pain, coping strategies, expectations, management, knowledge of their condition and its likely cause or contributing factors and their role in their pain management.</li> <li>8. Ensures ongoing follow-up supported by feedback to both patient and health care team of self-management interventions.</li> <li>9. Discusses and escalates issues with regards to self -management to nursing staff, clinicians and managers.</li> </ol>



# Domain Three: Treatment – use of pharmacological strategies

This domain explores how nurses contribute to the safe, timely and appropriate use of pharmacological therapies.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aware of any potential signs and symptoms/ contra-indication of pharmacological strategies.</li> <li>2. Recognises that medicines may impact mental capacity.</li> <li>3. Has a good understanding of the roles of the regulatory agencies involved in drug use, monitoring and licensing (for example the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, the Committee on Safety of Medicines the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and local formularies and committees).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Independently evaluates and articulates a clear rationale for the choice of pharmacological strategies.</li> <li>5. Independently manages adverse effects when appropriate and completes and maintains accurate documentation.</li> <li>6. Developing and consolidating independent decision-making skills.</li> <li>7. Supports patients taking their own pain relief where able and appropriate.</li> <li>8. Initiates careful titration and individualization of dose regimens.</li> <li>9. Developing and working towards an independent non-medical prescriber qualification with knowledge of the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of medicines used in a wide range of settings.</li> <li>10. Gives detailed explanations regarding pharmacological strategies to both staff and patients.</li> <li>11. Involved in the development of protocols and guidelines for treatment of side effects and complications associated with pharmacological strategies.</li> <li>12. Discusses all aspects of pharmacological strategies with the interdisciplinary team.</li> <li>13. Recognises and acts appropriately/ takes the lead in relation to clinical signs and symptoms of adverse effects from interventions.</li> </ol>

## Domain Three: Interventional strategies

This aspect of care outlines the role of interventions to improve and maintain function.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates clinical decision-making on the effectiveness of an intervention.</li> <li>2. Interprets the potential adverse clinical signs and symptoms of interventional therapies, manages adverse effects and completes comprehensive documentation in clinical records.</li> <li>3. Demonstrates the ability to provide advice and support for patients undergoing a pain management intervention.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Demonstrates the ability to provide advanced knowledge, skills, advice and management for patients undergoing a pain management intervention.</li> <li>5. Ability to act as a role model and actively engage patients with complex pain issues in their interventional pain management care.</li> <li>6. Communicates effectively with patients, families, MDT and managers regarding use of interventions.</li> <li>7. Independently deliver nursing and MDT interventional training sessions and/or programmes.</li> <li>8. Collaborates on development of policies guiding practice.</li> <li>9. Gives feedback to IDT about pain management intervention outcomes.</li> <li>10. Integrates the health and wellbeing of patients undergoing pain management interventions.</li> <li>11. Comprehensively records, discusses and escalates issues in relation to patient safety or service delivery with nursing staff, clinicians and managers.</li> </ol>

# Domain Four: Service development

This aspect of care describes how the nursing team contributes to the development of person-centred pain management provision ensuring the use of audit, research and education.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interprets innovation in nursing practice at local and regional level.</li> <li>2. Involved in and leads the development of high-quality services by identifying team values, direction and policies.</li> <li>3. Promotes a dynamic pain service that responds to appropriate changes and motivates the staff team.</li> <li>4. Acts as a role model to guide and teach other health care staff about the rationale for incorporating a biopsychosocial/spiritual approach to pain management.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Leads the development of high-quality services by identifying team values, direction and policies.</li> <li>6. Constructively undertakes own role in improving services as agreed through continuous appraisal and supports others effectively during times of change.</li> <li>7. Develops robust educational programme and delivers pain management training to all health care professionals throughout the organisation.</li> <li>8. Evaluates with others the effectiveness of service improvements and agrees any further action required to take them forward.</li> <li>9. Monitors care, ensuring staff are meeting objectives. Escalates concerns.</li> <li>10. Acts as a mentor and role model to support and develop junior staff in relation to pain management.</li> </ol>

## Domain Five: Pain management in specialist groups

This aspect of care describes how the nursing team contributes to the development of person-centred pain management provision in specialist complex groups ensuring the use of audit, research, and education.

Knowledge	Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates knowledge of the biopsychosocial model of pain and relationship to pain behaviours in complex and specialist pain groups.</li> <li>2. Demonstrates knowledge of the pathophysiology and psychology of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addiction and substance misuse</li> <li>• chronic primary pain conditions</li> <li>• older adults</li> <li>• children and young people</li> <li>• headache and migraine</li> <li>• cancer-related pain and end of life</li> <li>• diabetic peripheral neuropathy</li> <li>• neuromodulation</li> <li>• learning disabilities</li> <li>• other areas specific to own area of practice.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Demonstrates knowledge regarding the impact of other long-term conditions on the pain experience.</li> <li>4. Identifies situations such as suicidal ideation that requires a more comprehensive assessment and seeks advice or refers as appropriate.</li> <li>5. Identifies and works within sphere of own practice.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Undertakes a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment of a patient with complex pain.</li> <li>7. Demonstrates clinical decision-making on the implementation and effect of pain management strategies in complex pain.</li> <li>8. Evaluates the effect of pain management approaches using biopsychosocial assessments for patients receiving evidence-based treatment.</li> <li>9. Independently, effectively and safely manages all aspects of biopsychosocial care for the patient living with complex pain.</li> <li>10. Manages adverse effects and completes comprehensive documentation in clinical records.</li> <li>11. Acts as a role model and actively engages patients and their families with complex pain issues in their pain management.</li> <li>12. Communicates effectively with patients, families, IDT and managers.</li> <li>13. Independently delivers nursing and IDT education and/or programmes relating to complex pain.</li> <li>14. Collaborates on development of policies guiding practice in relating to complex pain.</li> <li>15. Able to implement and integrate the health and wellbeing of patients into daily practice and guide others.</li> <li>16. Implements a culturally responsive individualised plan to manage complex pain.</li> </ol>



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

RCN Direct  
[www.rcn.org.uk/direct](http://www.rcn.org.uk/direct)  
0345 772 6100

Published by the Royal College of Nursing  
20 Cavendish Square  
London  
W1G 0RN

020 7409 3333  
[www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

February 2023  
Review date: August 2024  
Publication code: 010 750

