



Royal College
of Nursing

Maximising Nursing Skills in Caring for Children and Young People in Emergency Care Settings

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE





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This publication is due for review in June 2022. To provide feedback on its contents or on your experience of using the publication, please email publications.feedback@rcn.org.uk

Publication

This is an RCN practice guidance. Practice guidance are evidence-based consensus documents, used to guide decisions about appropriate care of an individual, family or population in a specific context.

Description

The RCN in conjunction with the RCPCH in *Facing the Future: Standards for Children in Emergency Care Settings* set out the minimum standards for safe and effective care in emergency departments. The aim of this guidance is to offer safe, interim solutions until these standards can be met by maximising the knowledge and skills of nurses working in emergency or urgent care settings.

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Evaluation

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Contents

Introduction	4
Competencies	5
Achieving competence	6
Useful resources	7
References	7

Introduction

Emergency departments (ED) report annual growth not only in the numbers of patients attending but changes in the conditions and acuity of the patients who attend (RCPCH, 2014). This requires ED nursing staff to continually expand their skills and knowledge to ensure quality patient care is given. This increasing number of patients and changing acuity also includes children and young people (CYP). Most notably there is a year on year 5% increase in the number of infants with minor ailments (viral respiratory illnesses and feeding problems in particular) being brought to an ED (Keeble and Kossarova, 2017). The significantly high numbers of young people attending with (self) poisoning reflects ongoing challenges of access to children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Children and young people have differing health care needs when compared to adults often requiring specialist care. By virtue of age and size they also have vulnerabilities due to their dependency on carers (Keeble and Kossarova, 2017) and safeguarding is a key concern to be addressed in the ED. This changing demographic of attendance challenges further the skills of the nursing staff within the ED.

Facing the Future: Standards for Children in Emergency Care Settings (RCPCH, 2018) clearly sets out the standards for nursing CYP in emergency care settings by requiring departments to have at least two registered children's nurses (RN (child) or equivalent) on duty per shift. These nurses should also have recognised training in both trauma and emergency nursing. This standard acknowledges

the depth of training registered children's nurses require in emergency care environments and the importance of broader knowledge and skills associated with child development, CYP health care needs and an embedded approach to nursing care in keeping with RCN CYP nursing philosophy of care (RCN, 2014 update due in 2020). Meeting these standards will be challenging for some EDs across the UK as historically many EDs caring for children will be staffed by registered adult nurses. The aim of this guidance is to offer safe, interim solutions until these standards can be met by maximising the knowledge and skills of nurses working in emergency or urgent care settings.

To comprehensively demonstrate the breadth and depth of nursing skills required to work safely and effectively in an ED, the RCN developed a *National Curriculum and Competency Framework for Emergency Nursing levels 1 and 2* (2017). This includes the standards of competence to safely care for children and young people within emergency or urgent care settings. This framework should form the basis for the nursing skills and competences within an ED and will be used as a standard for the guidance within this publication.

This revised publication has a primary target audience of emergency department and urgent care centre managers, lead nurses, lead consultants and workforce planners as children and young people may present to any of the urgent or emergency care departments regardless of size or location across the UK.

Competencies

The National Curriculum and Competency Framework for Emergency Nursing levels 1 and 2 (RCN, 2017) includes the standards of competence to safely care for children and young people within emergency or urgent care settings. Clinical domain 4 specifically sets out to address the knowledge and skills required to safely care for children and young people in the ED.

It should be acknowledged that although a registered adult nurse would be able to complete these competencies and demonstrate the level of competence required by this curriculum, this is not an acceptable substitution of the RCPCH (2018) standard requiring two registered children's nurses (RN (child) or equivalent) on each shift in EDs that care for children and young people. These competencies do not replace the knowledge and skills of a registered children's nurse and only give assurances that a registered adult nurse would be able to provide competent

care to a child and young person in the ED, not the holistic care of a registered children's nurse.

These frameworks recognise and set out the level of competence required of any nurse working in an emergency or urgent care setting. Registered adult nurses (RN adult) will need training in both the specialist aspects of ED nursing as well as further training and education to meet the competencies associated with caring for children and young people. Most notably, training in recognising sick children and safeguarding would be required. Registered children's nurses will need further training in specialist aspects of ED nursing but would be trained in recognition of sick children, safeguarding and the wider aspects of children's nursing. Therefore, registered children's nurses should be able to meet these competencies in a shorter timeframe.

Achieving competence

To develop the professional knowledge and interpersonal skills required to achieve these competencies the following is an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of options and opportunities for nurses.

- **Induction programme:** when starting work in an ED the RN (adult or child) should have an induction period that also addresses their roles and responsibilities when caring for children and young people in the ED. This induction period should provide supervision and support for the nurse new to emergency care and children and young people's nursing within that setting.
- **Departmental/specialty teaching:** multidisciplinary education across departments (emergency medicine, paediatrics, critical care, safeguarding, etc.) and local networks can provide the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills required. This requires protected education sessions away from the clinical area.
- **Emergency care modules:** higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK provide a number of established and high-quality modules at both level 6 and 7. These can provide not only the professional knowledge required to care for children and young people in the ED but allow for the practical skills (pain assessment, growth monitoring, etc.) to be developed also.
- **Online education packages:** there are an increasing number of online resources available to the NHS which can be accessed and provide the underpinning education required.
- **Experiential learning:** work shadowing, rotational programmes or protected time to work on children's wards, assessment units, high dependency or critical care units would provide the emergency nurse with an opportunity to safely develop their children and young people's nursing skills and broaden their experience of child health nursing. This should be combined with targeted competencies to be achieved during this protected time. This would allow the emergency nurse to have a greater awareness of child development, childhood illnesses and family-centred care. This would help in the development of the communication skills required when caring for children and their families in the challenging emergency department.
- **Simulation learning:** multidisciplinary simulation sessions not only provide the opportunity to demonstrate skills and knowledge as an individual and a team but allow for a learning environment to identify gaps in knowledge and skills that need to be addressed.

Useful resources

Advanced Paediatric Life Support, Advanced Life Support Group
www.alsg.org/home

E-learning for healthcare – online modules (free access for NHS staff)
www.e-lfh.org.uk

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health – study days, courses, guidelines and eLearning
www.rcpch.ac.uk

Royal College of Emergency Medicine – study days and guidelines
www.rcem.ac.uk

Royal College of Nursing – various publications including guidance on measuring vital signs in children
www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Spotting the Sick Child
www.spottingthesickchild.com

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