

# A Competency Framework for Rheumatology Nurses: **Advanced Level Practitioner**

This document should be used in conjunction with the first edition of the RCN's *Competency Framework for Rheumatology Nurses* (2020) as guidance, this includes advice on the assessment process and on providing evidence. The competency framework is available at: [www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-009004](http://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-009004)

Level of competency attainment guidance	Level
Cannot perform/demonstrate this activity satisfactorily or participate in the clinical environment	1
Can perform/demonstrate this activity but not without constant supervision and assistance	2
Can perform/demonstrate this activity with some supervision or assistance - and in clinical settings discussing cases as needed	3
Can perform without supervision or assistance demonstrating more than acceptable speed and quality showing initiative and adaptability to special problem situations - and in clinical settings discussing only difficult cases	4
Can perform without supervision or assistance demonstrating more than acceptable speed and quality showing initiative and adaptability to special problem situations and can lead others in undertaking this activity - and in clinical settings bringing pertinent cases to MDT meetings or appropriate clinician as required	5

Adapted from Benner (1984).

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<b>Competency 1: Specialism knowledge</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Has undertaken specialist qualification at advanced level.				
Understands the individual and national health burden of rheumatological conditions and how this impacts patients and services.				
Understands the diagnostic criteria, aetiology, biology and pathophysiology of MSK and rheumatological conditions, co-morbidities, and differential diagnoses and risk factors, including complex autoimmune connective tissue diseases, vasculitis, rare metabolic bone disease or inherited connective tissue disease and treatment pathways.				
Understands the main classifications of drug therapy including analgesia, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), immune modulatory drugs and corticosteroids.				
Understands treatment pathways including Treat to Target, self-management strategies, and national standards.				
Understands the difference between paediatric and adult onset disease and what happens to their disease through a lifetime course.				
Understands the impact of combination therapies, increases in dosage and the risks related to immunosuppression (especially in CYP).				
Understands the risk factors for prolonged corticosteroid use and impact upon children and young people's growth, weight, skin and pubertal development.				
Understands the differences between delivery of care in a paediatric, adolescent, young person and adult care setting.				

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Understands the red flags indicating uveitis in a young child and the importance of screening and regular review for evidence of uveitis in children.				
Understands bone health, including the importance of diet, vitamin D, micronutrients, exercise and associated risk factors and their importance within the rheumatology context including child development (where appropriate).				
Understands falls and fracture risk in rheumatology patients and can explain these to patients and carers.				
Understands normal, osteopenia and osteoporosis dual energy-ray absorptiometry (DXA) results, and resulting treatment options.				
Understanding of the role of the multidisciplinary team (MDT).				
<b>Skills and behaviours</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
Provides person-centred care in relation to the specific health care needs of patients with rheumatological conditions.				
Uses specialist knowledge to evaluate new and complex clinical ideas that are emerging in the most advanced arenas in rheumatology.				
Able to describe multifactorial issues in the development of rheumatological conditions and can explain these to patients and carers				
Can apply appropriate management pathways for complex autoimmune connective tissue diseases, vasculitis, rare metabolic bone disease and inherited connective tissue disease with guidance where needed.				

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Drives person-centred care in relation to the specific health care needs of the local population of patients with rheumatological conditions served by the organisation.				
Discusses the principles of rheumatology nursing practice and explains how care is organised throughout the patient journey to colleagues and people with rheumatological conditions and their carers.				
Actively develops the practice of others on all aspects of rheumatological conditions and associated co-morbidities.				
Contributes to development of effective treatment pathways and teaching programmes on all aspects of Rheumatological treatment pathways, and national standards.				
Is able to discuss the individual and national health burden of rheumatological conditions and how this impacts services.				
Identifies and acts on DXA results and requests other relevant tests to exclude diseases that can present with osteoporosis and vertebral fracture.				
Offers advice and educates colleagues and patients with rheumatological conditions and carers about the significance of bone health, vertebral fractures and approaches to fracture risk reduction in at risk rheumatology patients and monitors the effectiveness of treatments.				

<b>Competency 2: Clinical assessment planning implementation and evaluation</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Has indepth knowledge of all aspects of MSK and clinical assessment in rheumatological conditions incorporating latest clinical guidance and research into practice.				
Understands normal body movements and factors which might alter these; including child development, delayed diagnosis and access to care.				
Understands the importance of carrying out disease activity scoring and other outcome measures relevant to patient or condition.				
Understands the importance of correctly identifying and managing pain and develops an understanding of pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches.				
Understands the reasons for appropriate requesting of investigations such as blood tests. radiological investigations, x-rays, US, CT, and MRI.				
Accurately interprets a range of investigations using the results to derive a management plan.				
Understands the importance of potentially serious pathology (red flags) and reports to appropriate clinician.				
Understands infection prevention procedures and is specifically aware of infection risks for rheumatology patients, especially those on immune modulating therapies.				
Understands the Health and Safety at Work Act, public health issues, services policies, procedures and protocols, local cytotoxic policy for administration of methotrexate and cyclophosphamide - including risk factors to mothers giving treatment to their children while pregnant.				

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<p>Holds IR(ME)R certification and relevant training for investigation of more comprehensive clinical findings where appropriate according to local policy.</p>				
<p>Knowledge of the non-MSK manifestations of rheumatological pathologies.</p>				
<p>Knowledge of the potential psychological and social implications of living with a rheumatological condition.</p>				
<p>Understands falls risk implications and the importance of assessment.</p>				
<p><b>Skills and behaviours</b></p>	<p><b>Evidence</b></p>	<p><b>Level achieved</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>	<p><b>Assessor/self-assessed</b></p>
<p>Monitors specialist infection control compliance and adheres to policies and national guidelines.</p>				
<p>Carries out comprehensive MSK and rheumatology assessments; including multisystem assessments, interpreting and acting on findings.</p>				
<p>Develops effective use of selective questioning and gauging responses (consultation skills) to achieve accurate assessment.</p>				
<p>Requests investigations appropriately and recognises unexpected findings and reports these appropriately.</p>				
<p>Applies knowledge of normal body mechanics and Includes additional physical examination to further understand the impact of the patient's diagnosis.</p>				
<p>Initiates shared decision making in partnership with the patient based on experience and expertise to achieve the best outcome.</p>				

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Ability to carry out venepuncture or cannulation if appropriate.				
Identifies and supports patients to manage acute and chronic pain, referring to appropriate services.				
Undertakes accurate disease activity scoring, incorporating knowledge of wider factors, including red flags and co-morbidities influencing this.				
Identify and acts on complex issues where outcomes are not met.				
Uses expert knowledge and critical thinking to explain and advise management options, including more complex cases, and family and child protection conferences.				
Uses specialist knowledge to define other manifestations of rheumatological diseases and screening processes monitoring individual and service performance.				
Documents and monitors progress towards agreed targets and explaining these to patients and carers.				
Uses expert skills to reach positive outcomes where patient deviates from agreed person-centred care plan.				
Collaborates with MDT to ensure red flag processes are effective, safe, responsive and well led through audit and risk management processes.				
Ensures relevant specialism training is in place and monitors effectiveness of consultations.				

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Audits effectiveness of referral pathways and works with MDT where changes in practice are required.				
Proactively identifies adult and child safeguarding issues and liaises appropriately with relevant agencies.				
Uses age appropriate language and scoring and measurement tools relevant to disease monitoring, including parent/carer where appropriate.				
Contributes to Child in Need plans, team around the family and child protection conferences.				
Support progression through age appropriate care from paediatric to adult care.				
Initiates falls and fracture risk assessment referral.				



<b>Competency 3: Disease management</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Knowledge of the implications of long-term conditions, their ongoing management and effects on patients and families.				
Holds appropriate non-medical prescribing qualification and competency.				
Understands public health issues regarding the potential for the misuse of drugs.				
Understands the of the mode of action and aims of use of therapies, screening, side effects, monitoring requirements, pre-treatment safety checks and reporting side effects complying with local policy.				
Knowledge of side effects of treatment and complies with local policy on reporting side effects.				
Understands the implications of the use of patient group directions (PGDs) and non-medical prescribing.				
Knowledge of the use of over the counter (OTC) medication and non-pharmacological interventions including complementary therapy and supplements.				
Holds appropriate joint injection qualification and competency.				
Knowledge and understanding of other therapies and services that may be suitable.				
Knowledge of strategic evidence-based management approaches to improve patient outcomes including insight into cost efficiency of service.				

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Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Undertakes risk assessment and capacity assessment of patient and carers and educates staff about this.				
Advises where further assessment of capacity is necessary and seeks advice when needed.				
Able to support patient and family to select most appropriate medication and administration of medication and provides support for ongoing self-management and assesses treatment concordance.				
Educates staff, patients and carers regarding symptoms and side effects of treatments used and importance of concordance to treatment.				
Undertakes safe non-medical prescribing within agreed local protocols and recommends next steps in disease management, referring to other specialists as required.				
Undertakes safe use of PGDs within agreed local protocols. Evaluates reported side effects of treatments and actively manages these, seeking advice where needed.				
Advises on management of common and rare side effects and explores other treatment options where appropriate.				
Ensures processes are in place to manage and report side effects and contribute to active registers.				
Advises patients and carers on the appropriate use of OTC medications and supplements and the potential interactions with prescribed medications.				
Understands the use of 'off licence' prescribing. Counsels and supports patient and carer in safe administration of medication at home with knowledge of risk factors including use of off licence treatments.				

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Competent to administer specialist prescribed treatments.				
Safely administers Entonox for procedures as per local policies.				
Audits prescribing practice against national guidance.				
Demonstrates safe and accurate joint aspiration and joint injection.				
Develops effective treatment pathways to support patients who are corticosteroid dependant.				
Develops strategies which could be implemented to improve concordance.				
Provision of information to other agencies where appropriate to ensure reasonable adjustments to support the patient.				
Co-ordinates multidisciplinary patient management and follow up and develops collaborative working practices.				
Supports the prescribing and monitoring of medication when delivered in another health care setting or within a clinical network.				
Identifies patients at risk or in need of advice or referral regarding misuse of drugs or over prescription.				
Identifies and refers patients to other therapies and services working collaboratively to enhance service delivery and patient outcomes.				

<b>Competency 4: Communication</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Understands factors effecting self-management and evidence-based approaches to patient education.				
Understands of national guidance documents within the scope of rheumatology to support safe practice.				
Has the knowledge to access specific tools to aid rheumatological assessment.				
Understands national guidance documents within the scope of rheumatology to support safe practice.				
Considers appropriate alternative ways that care can be delivered to improve patient experience with a rheumatological condition ensuring communication needs are enhanced.				
<b>Skills and behaviours</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
Utilises shared decision-making goal setting and action planning and obtains patient's lay beliefs to enhance concordance.				
Describes approaches to diagnosis, treatments and ongoing monitoring to patients and their carers.				
Ensures accurate information is provided to patients, carers and families when starting treatment to support safe medication administration, in a developmentally appropriate manner.				
Ensures staff are aware of prerequisite information before starting immune modulating medications such as pretesting and discussions around patient choice.				
Supports staff to make every contact count in rheumatology where patients have specific risk factors.				

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Ensures information regarding rheumatology and home care delivery services and out of hours procedures and access.				
Acts to collaborate and promote drug persistence and adherence.				
Liaises with and maintains professional working relationships with key stakeholders and agencies involved in the care pathway.				
Develops information in partnership with patient representatives, stakeholders and senior managers to ensure information needs are met.				
Monitors delivery of home care supplies of medication and ensures staff and patients are familiar with processes.				
Ensures adequate provision of medication liaising with prescribers as needed.				
Contributes to the development and evaluation of specialist local patient information resources and seeks patient feedback.				
Ensures clear communication routes are used by patients having home care delivery.				
Promotes e-health approaches, telemedicine, care planning and documentation in line with local policies and national guidelines.				
Demonstrates specific skills to undertake telephone consultations.				
Contributes to evidence-based patient education sessions co-ordinating with the MDT for delivery, taking into account the individual needs of patients and carers.				
Supports the delivery of care across a clinical network. Communicates and shares relevant information with other agencies interacting with the child, young person or young adult, including schools and colleges.				

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<b>Competency 5: Service delivery</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Is aware of pathways used in rheumatology and follows them for patient care.				
Is aware of patient feedback mechanisms.				
Understands the importance of planned smooth transfer of care between primary, community and secondary care settings.				
Financial awareness of budget setting needs.				
Has undertaken management and service-related training.				
Understands the implications for funding of biologic therapy.				
Ability to complete service-specific training needs analysis for nursing team.				
Utilises patient feedback, compliments and complaints to advance service development and improvement.				

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Skills and behaviours	Evidence	Level achieved	Date	Assessor/self-assessed
Undertakes evaluation of patient experience to improve service delivery.				
Manages clinical caseload safely, effectively and efficiently demonstrating excellent time keeping skills.				
Carries out clinical annual review using local protocol.				
Ensures systems are in place to support patients and carers where necessary.				
Uses quantitative outcome measures to review clinical effectiveness of service provided and performance against contractual requirements.				
Manages service skill mix requirements, supporting team members to ensure core service delivery.				
Manages job planning to ensure appropriate time is allocated to core components of roles.				
Involved in the development of referral pathways into rheumatology service; understands the wider political environment and how this influences service redesign.				

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Ensures robust data collection and adherence to commissioning requirements for high cost drugs.				
Ability to recognise referrals that are inappropriate and use pathways to take action and when to discuss this with referrer.				
Ability to recognise when to seek guidance when making triage decisions.				
Ability to complete relevant funding applications for biologic therapy for adults and CYP.				
Provides teaching to young people at an age appropriate level to encourage self-administration and self-management.				
Management of transitional care plans and engaging with young people and carers early in preparation for transfer to adult rheumatology teams.				
Regular liaison with follow on care services, ensuring ongoing support of young person and carer after transfer.				



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<b>Competency 6: Governance and accountability</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Understands the principles of duty of care and the importance of reporting near misses and errors.				
Understands research approaches and their relevance to practice.				
Undertaken quality improvement module.				
<b>Skills and behaviours</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
Ensures duty of care principle embedded within the service policies and protocols and collaborates with the organisations clinical governance framework.				
Uses DATIX or equivalent system for reporting near misses and/or errors.				
Ensures evidence-based practice and research embedded within the services policies and protocols and collaborates with the organisations clinical governance framework.				
Applies quality improvement outcomes.				
Shares best practice and attends journal clubs or wider research meetings.				
Participates in quality improvement processes and audit and can present data to colleagues.				
Able to identify and develop learning opportunities for others based on their needs.				

<b>Competency 7: Leadership and development</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>				
Knowledge of organisational change and leadership models including the characteristics of effective leadership styles, development and succession planning, and concepts associated with vision, strategy, goals and objectives.				
Participates in local and regional or national meetings, contributing to rheumatology development.				
Accesses a foundation level leadership training.				
Understands the importance of specific research methods.				
Understands the nature of projects and deadlines and how these can impact the service.				
<b>Skills and behaviours</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Level achieved</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assessor/self-assessed</b>
Promotes organisational goals. Understands service and organisation's policies and practices.				
Promotes a positive working environment developing a learning culture which promotes reflective practice.				
Provides clinical supervision. Provides leadership in the implementation of national standards.				
Demonstrates resilience in the workplace and is able to share strategies with team members.				

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Uses literature searches to access current evidence for clinical practice and takes part in research.				
Uses expert clinical knowledge and leadership skills to operationally influence service change.				
Can mentor staff and appraise as appropriate.				
Manages and oversees delivery of specialist rheumatology services.				
Contributes to specialism education, professional development of students and colleagues in the workplace.				
Can lead a meeting.				
Clearly defines expectations of contributions from the team adapting leadership style to the specific situation ensuring deadlines are met.				
Carries out regular appraisals of staff members.				
Regularly attends professional forums, local teaching, regional network updates on treatments and maintains own knowledge and competence to meet professional standards, CPD and revalidation requirements.				

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Area identified for development	Review date	Outcome

I confirm that the level of competence described above evidences my current skills and capability within the competence framework.

**Signed**

**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signed**

**Designation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**