



Position Statement

Scope of nursing practice

ICN Position:

Nursing is responsible for articulating and disseminating clear definitions of the roles nurses engage in, and the profession's scope of practice. National nursing organisations make a substantial contribution to defining nursing and nurses' roles that are consistent with accepted international definitions articulated by the International Council of Nurses (ICN), and relevant to their nation's health care needs. While nurses, through professional, labour relations and regulatory bodies, take a central role in defining, monitoring and periodically evaluating roles and scope of practice, the views of others in society including the public, government, health care employers and other professional groups contribute to defining nurses scope of practice.

Nurses are both responsible and accountable for their nursing practice (ICN 2010). The scope of nursing practice is not limited to specific tasks, functions or responsibilities but is a combination of knowledge, judgement and skill that allows the nurse to perform direct care giving and evaluate its impact, advocate for patients and for health, supervise and delegate to others, lead, manage, teach, undertake research and develop health policy for health care systems. The scope of practice is dynamic and responsive to changing health needs, knowledge development, and technological advances. Periodic review of scopes of practice is therefore essential to ensure consistency with current health needs and to support improved health outcomes. Scopes of practice should be sufficiently broad and flexible to permit freedom for innovation, growth and change (ICN 2009).

- Governments, have a responsibility to provide legislation which recognises the distinctive and autonomous nature of nursing practice including a defined scope of practice that is reflective of nurses' capabilities as well as flexible and responsive to the dynamic nature of health care delivery and the public's health care needs.
- National nurses associations (NNAs) with regulatory authorities have a responsibility to seek support for such legislation and to help nurses understand their defined scope of practice.

Employers have a responsibility to support nurses in practicing to and within their full scope of practice. This includes not placing nurses in situations where they are being asked to practice beyond their level of competence or outside their legal scope of practice and providing practice environments that support safe and competent practice.

**International
Council of Nurses**

3, place Jean-Marceau
CH -1201 Geneva • Switzerland
Telephone +41 (22) 908 0100
Fax +41 (22) 908 0101
e-Mail : icn@icn.ch
Website : www.icn.ch

/over...

Background

The scope of nursing practice is defined within a legislative and regulatory framework and describes the competencies (knowledge, skills and judgement), professional accountabilities and responsibilities of the nurse. It provides the foundation for establishing standards of nursing practice, nursing education, nursing roles and responsibilities and also conveys to the public the characteristics of who is qualified to provide particular nursing services (ICN 2010). A clearly defined scope of practice communicates to all stakeholders the competencies and accountabilities of the nurse. Nursing's authority comes from evidence-based knowledge related to its sphere of practice. However, nursing is also allied to other health professions through its collaborating, referring and co-ordinating activities, and thus has developed a distinct as well as a shared body of knowledge and practice. The practice and competence of an individual nurse within the legal scope of practice is influenced by a variety of factors including education, experience, expertise and interests as well as the context of practice. Therefore, definitions of roles and scope of practice need to reflect what is distinctly nursing, while communicating the inter-professional nature of health care.

Nurses require appropriate initial and ongoing education and training as well as lifelong learning to practice competently within their scope of practice. Therefore, nursing must ensure that nurse educators and nursing administrators are experienced nurses with suitable qualifications and understanding of the competencies and conditions required to deliver quality nursing care in the current health care environment. To enable the profession to provide competent leadership and innovation in practice, NNAs should be vigilant in their support and advocacy of nurses being prepared with the necessary competencies, evidence and peer support to function in all levels of the health system. NNAs should actively promote the position that qualified nurses need to be major participants in the planning and direction of nursing education, nursing services, regulatory bodies and other health related activities.

Adopted in 1998

(Replaced previous ICN Positions: "Nursing Authority", adopted in 1975 and "Nurses' Accountability for Defining the Nursing Role", adopted in 1985.)

Reviewed and revised in 2004 and 2013

/over...

Related ICN Positions:

- Nursing regulation
- Protection of the title “Nurse”
- Management of nursing and health care services

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.

References:

International Council of Nurses (2010) *Scope of Nursing Practice and Decision-Making Framework Toolkit*, ICN, Geneva.

International Council of Nurses (2009) *Regulation 2020: An Exploration of the Present; Vision for the Future*. ICN, Geneva.