Position Statement

Continuing competence as a professional responsibility and public right

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and its member organisations believe that the overriding purpose of assuring the continuing competence of nurses is the protection of the public.

ICN further believes that nurses are responsible and accountable for their nursing practice and have a duty to comply with their code of practice and maintain their competence.

ICN supports a commitment to life long learning so that nurses can meet current challenges presented by the expansion of knowledge, changes in population demographics and health systems enhancement and redesign.

ICN strongly encourages nurses to engage in reflective practice, a process where the nurse reviews her actions and inactions to determine her learning needs and then addresses these to improve her practice.

ICN and national nurses associations have a responsibility to promote professional growth and development, so that nurses remain competent within the context of rapidly changing patient needs, technological advancement and systems redesign.

ICN believes that the maintenance of competence is a shared responsibility between the nursing profession and other relevant parties.

Given the significance of this issue to patient safety, ICN encourages the following key stakeholders to meet their roles and obligations in contributing to the continuing competence of the practitioner.

Public and Patients

- Participate as an active partner in care
- Provide feedback on performance
- Report practitioners who fail to deliver competent practice

Government

- Establish regulatory bodies
- Facilitate development of legislation and regulatory systems that assess continuing competence
- Support remedial action
The Nurse Regulator
- Establish required competencies. Communicate competencies to all stakeholders
- Utilise tools to allow for the demonstration of competence
- Specify processes and hold individual nurses accountable through continuing competence assessment and disciplinary process

The Individual Nurse
- Understand legal and ethical obligations
- Integrate competencies into practice
- Conduct self-assessment
- Limit practice according to competence, in compliance with the law, client needs, and best available evidence
- Participate in professional development activities

The Employer
- Incorporate professional standards into institutional/organisational policies
- Provide for assessment of nurse performance
- Evaluate nurses upon report of poor performance
- Support and review planned remedial action
- File mandatory reports as required

The Education Community
- Undertake research to assess impact of competence on practice
- Design and deliver programmes that incorporate competencies into curriculum that address current and future patient and professional needs

National Nurses Associations
- Assist in the development and dissemination of competencies
- Identify and facilitate the continuing professional development needs of nurses
- Promote integration of competencies into practice

Background

Competence to practice is the level of performance combined with any criteria required (such as hours of practice) to enable the registrant’s name to remain on the active register of practitioners.

Continuing competence is defined as the ongoing ability of a nurse to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgments and personal attributes required to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting\(^1\).

This reflects a continuous quality improvement approach to practice and the underlying philosophy of continually striving to learn from our experiences so as to improve services delivered and patient outcomes.

\(^1\) Canadian Nurses Association and Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (2004) Promoting Continuing Competence for Registered Nurses
Continuing competence is receiving increasing attention as patients and the public have greater access to information, are more questioning of the care and services they receive and better able to judge the competence of those nurses providing the care.

The practice environment may include factors such as workload, the availability of time to reflect, the availability of peers and resources to support learning which can impact on the ability of the nurse to maintain competence.

Competence assessment should be systematic, reliable, valid and regular. Methods used to gather evidence of competence may include a range of sources that can be triangulated to produce an integrated assessment. Evidence may be gathered through self, peer and patient feedback and through formal assessed learning.

Personal portfolios may be used to gather evidence and record reflection on practice. They may include a personal development plan in which the nurse documents any learning needs identified through the systematic review of competence.

Where a nurse is found to lack competence the regulator can restrict practice by placing conditions on that practice, for example further education or supervision.

The overriding right to privacy and confidentiality of purpose should be maintained. The information gathered to evidence continuing competence is exclusively for that purpose, is confidential between the registrant and the regulatory body and cannot be used for other purposes such as discipline or legal proceedings.

Adopted in 2006

**Related ICN Positions:**
- Cultural and linguistic competence
- Nursing regulation
- Scope of nursing practice

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.