



Position Statement

Protection of the title “Nurse”

ICN Position:

The title of “Nurse” should be protected by law and applied to and used only by those legally authorised to represent themselves as nurses and to practice nursing.¹

Background

One of the most significant advantages of a statutory regulatory system is that it can offer protection to the title of “Nurse”.² Persons receiving health care and those employing nurses have a right to know whether they are dealing with a legally qualified nurse. Reserving the title “Nurse” for those who meet the legal standard enhances public protection by allowing the public to distinguish legally qualified nurses from other care providers.³

Persons who legitimately use the title “Nurse” are individually responsible and accountable for their competence and actions, and are required to adhere to professional codes of practice, ethics and conduct in conjunction with standards, laws and regulations that direct practice.

Nurses need to be educated about their legal rights to the exclusive use of this title, and the ensuing accountability and responsibilities related to maintaining competence and practicing within the scope of practice assigned to those who are entitled by law to bear this title.

The public and employers also need to be educated and informed about the use of the title “Nurse”. In the absence of formal title protection, any individual could represent themselves as a “Nurse” without holding the required qualifications or demonstrating the necessary competence.

The purpose of restricting use of the title "Nurse" is to protect the public from individuals who are not licensed or authorised to practice as nurses, but may hold themselves out as providing health services that only nurses may provide.

The unlawful use of the title “Nurse” should result in criminal, civil, and/or administrative actions against the person and anyone who assists them in using the title “Nurse”.

¹ The definition of nurse and the defined scope of nursing practice may vary from country to country.

² International Council of Nurses (2007) *Model Nursing Act*, Geneva.

³ International Council of Nurses (1996) *ICN on Regulation: Towards 21st Century Models*, Geneva, p.20.

Adopted in 1998

Reviewed and revised in 2004 and 2012

(Replaced previous ICN Position: "The Title of Nurse", 1995)

Related ICN Positions:

- Nursing regulation
- Scope of nursing practice
- Assistive nursing personnel
- Health Human Resources Development (HHRD)

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.