

What is a Registered Nurse?

“RNs are self-regulated health-care professionals who work autonomously and in collaboration with others to enable individuals, families, groups, communities and populations to achieve their optimal levels of health. At all stages of life, in situations of health, illness, injury and disability, RNs deliver direct health-care services, coordinate care and support clients in managing their own health. RNs contribute to the health-care system through their leadership across a wide range of settings in practice, education, administration, research and policy.” (CNA, 2015)

Registered nurses are well prepared to address population health challenges such as the increasing prevalence of chronic illness and the rapidly expanding aging population by preventing deterioration and emergency room visits; improving health outcomes; and enhancing the quality and safety of care. Registered nurses are innovative, evidence-informed, knowledgeable and cost-effective practitioners. The RN is responsible for the coordination of care and determines the most appropriate care provider to meet the needs of the client. RNs possess the knowledge, skills and critical thinking to assume a leadership role in the care of all clients and to improve client outcomes applying a population health approach.

RNs are “knowledge navigators” and direct clients to credible resources, teaching them to interpret and evaluate information and support them to find their way in the health care system (CNA, 2015). Without this support, care becomes fragmented and vulnerable people fall through cracks in the system. RNs support clients to make evidence-informed and personal values appropriate decisions about their health and health care that reduces decisional conflict and decisional regret. RNs support, advocate for, and respect clients’ decisions.

Scope of Practice

Scope of practice is a broad term that includes all the interventions that registered nurses are authorized, educated and competent to perform. The PEI *Registered Nurses Regulations, 2018* defines nursing as:

The health profession in which a person applies specialized and evidence-based knowledge of nursing theory and health and human sciences, skills and judgment in providing professional services to another person, including

- (i) The promotion, maintenance and restoration of health, and
- (ii) The prevention, treatment and palliation of illness and injury, primarily by
 - (A) Assessing health status,
 - (B) Planning, implementing and evaluating interventions, and
 - (C) Coordinating health services, and

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- (iii) The research, education, management or administrative activities incidental to performing the services referred to in subclauses (i) and (ii).

the performance of professional services requiring specialized knowledge of Nursing theory and the biological, physical, behavioural, psychological and sociological science as the basis for:

- i) assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation in
 - (A) the prevention of illness and the promotion and maintenance of health,
 - (B) the facilitation of the management of illness, injury or infirmity,
 - (C) the restoration of optimum function, or
 - (D) the provision of palliative care; and
- (ii) research, education, management or administration

RNs are accountable to practice nursing in accordance with the *CRNPEI Standards of Practice* and the *CNA Code of Ethics*. In addition to legislated responsibilities, RNs must demonstrate compliance with established policies and procedures. (ARNPEI, 2017).

The Domains of Registered Nurses

As outlined by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) in 2011, registered nursing includes four distinct domains – clinical practice; education; administration; and research. Some descriptors also include health policy as a nursing domain of practice. Examples of roles within each domain are cited below.

Clinical Practice - In providing health services RNs engage in the following key roles which are effectively integrated in practice: The Registered Nurse is responsible for the coordination of care and determines the most appropriate care provider to meet the needs of the client.

- direct care provider,
- critical thinker, assessor and interpreter,
- coordinator of care, planner and evaluator
- participant, developer and/or leader in quality improvement activities
- decision-maker and problem solver
- case manager
- client advocate
- health policy advocate
- leader
- mentor
- Advanced Practice Nurse

Administration - The Nurse Administrator directs and influences the work of others in a

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defined environment to enhance the shared vision of an organization or institution. Nurse administrators have the responsibility to:

- address issues that affect delivery of services to clients
- foster openness, interdisciplinary collaboration and accountability in colleagues and those they supervise
- create an environment that facilitates and encourages nursing staff to demonstrate accountability for their own practice
- contribute to defining the values of the organization, facility, or team; foster collaboration, communication and goal setting; and strive for high reliability performance among and across the continuum of care and the populations they work with or affect.

Education - The nurse educator refers to roles within academic settings and clinical practice settings:

The nurse educator within the academic setting is a scholarly teacher who assesses, plans, delivers and evaluates curricula designed to prepare graduates who meet the needs of a rapidly evolving health care system. Curricula provide a foundation of knowledge in arts, science and social science to prepare them to meet the needs of a broad range of clients and practice situations. Instruction is evidence-informed, clinically relevant, and promotes scholarly practice. Students are provided with opportunities to acquire clinical and moral imagination, in addition to requisite knowledge and abilities to prepare them for practice. The educator contributes to practice development in partnership with practice settings through knowledge transfer activities. (Benner P, Sutphen M, Leonard V, Day L.)

The nurse educator in the clinical practice setting enables professional development and continuing competence through agency-based programming that supports and validates lifelong learning. This is essential to professional nursing because it contributes to the quality of patient outcomes; the application of evidence to nursing practice, patient care, and health system transformation. (CNA & CASN 2004b).

Research - The registered nurse in a researcher role validates and refines existing knowledge and generates new knowledge that contributes to and influences all domains of nursing.

The knowledge generated through nursing research is used to support and guide nursing practice as well as improve nursing care, client outcomes and the health care system.” (CARNA, 2011)

Policy - The registered nurse contributes to healthy public policy and to evidence-informed policy processes by providing input, by implementing, and evaluating the impact of policy on individuals, communities and the health care system, as well as policy impact on professional nursing practice. RNs may work in formal policy roles in various sectors, including government, professional and practice settings.

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The Registered Nurse is a policy advocate for improved health outcomes of clients. This advocacy is demonstrated by “engaging others, exercising voice and mobilizing evidence to influence policy and practice. It means speaking out against inequity and inequality. It involves participating directly and indirectly in political processes and acknowledges the important roles of evidence, power and politics in advancing policy options.” <http://www.cna-aiic.ca/en/advocacy>

Advanced Practice Nurse

An **advanced practice nurse (APN)** is a nurse with graduate education in nursing. APNs are prepared with advanced didactic and clinical education, knowledge, skills, and scope of practice in nursing.

APN defines a level of nursing practice that utilizes extended and expanded skills, experience and knowledge in assessment, planning, implementation, diagnosis and evaluation of the care required. Nurses practicing at this level are educationally prepared at the post-graduate level and may work in either a specialist or generalist capacity. However, the basis of advanced practice is the high degree of knowledge, skill and experience that is applied within the nurse-patient/client relationship to achieve optimal outcomes through critical analysis, problem solving and evidence-based decision making.

Educational preparation and continued competence of the Registered Nurse

Nursing education prepares RNs to enact many roles to meet complex client, family, and community health needs in constantly evolving practice environments. RNs act to address the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health - especially poverty, housing, food insecurity and social exclusion that contribute most to individual health and a population's health status. Thus, they play a key role in illness and injury prevention and health promotion.

A baccalaureate degree in nursing is the required level of education for those entering the profession.

Conclusion

Dr. Gina Browne, a renowned Canadian RN and scientist, articulates the value and the role of the RN as “nurses are, after all, the leading providers and guardians of care at every level in our health care system. Evidence obtained from rigorous research confirms that services provided by RNs improve health outcomes. Registered nurses are also the most widely available and relevant professional services for the majority of citizens” (Browne, 2012).

References

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