



NURSING MATTERS

Nursing Matters fact sheets provide quick reference information and international perspectives from the nursing profession on current health and social issues.

Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nurse: Definition and Characteristics

Fact Sheet

Advances in technology, the increasing complexity of health services, structural changes in health care delivery, and changing health care needs underscore the search for innovative, cost-effective approaches to health care worldwide. An increasingly popular solution is utilizing nurses with advanced knowledge and skills. Research evidence indicates that advanced nursing roles are safe, effective and well received by clients.

The expertise, education and skills associated with these roles are diverse and context sensitive. A variety of titles are used throughout the world to denote advanced nursing practice (ANP). They include family nurse practitioner, adult nurse practitioner, primary care nurse practitioner, nurse midwife, clinical nurse specialist, nurse anaesthetist, community health nurse practitioner and women's health nurse practitioner. Paediatric nurse practitioner, gerontological nurse practitioner, emergency room as well as acute care nurse practitioner are also titles applied to ANP roles.

To facilitate an understanding of emerging nurse practitioner and advanced practice nursing roles globally, and to guide role development, the International Council of Nurses, through the expertise of its International Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nursing Network (INPAPNN), has developed the following definition (ICN, 2002):

“A Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nurse is a registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context and/or country in which s/he is credentialed to practice. A Masters degree is recommended for entry level.”

Role Characteristics

The following NP/APN characteristics reflect ICN's official position (ICN, 2002) and represent current and potential roles worldwide. These guidelines are seen as characteristics to aim for prior to role development but do not necessarily characterize the current status in all countries where NPs and APNs practice.

Educational Preparation

- Educational preparation at an advanced level,
- Formal recognition of educational programs preparing nurse practitioners/advanced practice nurses roles that are accredited or approved,
- Formal system of licensure, registration, certification and credentialing.

Nature of Practice

- Integrates research, education, practice and management,
- High degree of professional autonomy and independent practice,
- Case Management/own case load,
- Advanced health assessment skills, decision-making skills and diagnostic reasoning skills,
- Recognized advanced clinical competencies,
- Provision of consultant services to other health providers,
- Plans, implements and evaluates programs,
- Recognized first point of contact for clients.

Regulatory mechanisms – Country specific regulations underpin NP/APN practice

- Right to diagnose,
- Authority to prescribe medication,
- Authority to prescribe treatment,
- Authority to refer clients to other professionals,
- Authority to admit patients to hospital,
- Legislation to confer and protect the title “Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nurse”,
- Officially recognized titles for nurses working in advanced practice roles.

SStandards and regulation

Standards, regulations and supportive legislation underpin the development of advanced nursing practice worldwide. International and national nursing associations have key roles to play in the development of education and practice standards and regulation. As NPs and APNs seek employment and educational opportunities in other countries, and provide services across national and state borders, clarity and consistency in credentialing NPs and ANPs and accrediting educational programs will be required.

For further information, please contact: icn@icn.ch

The **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** 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.

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References

INPAPNN: Aim and objectives of the ICN International Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Network. Available from: URL: http://www.icn.ch/networks_ap.htm.

International Council of Nurses: Definition and characteristics for nurse practitioner/advanced practice nursing roles [official position paper], 2002, June. Available from: URL: http://www.icn.ch/networks_ap.htm.
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