

Chapter 2: Advanced Practice Nursing Concept and Roles

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Introduction

Shifting demographics and changes in population health have resulted in changes in healthcare (Lee et al., 2020). The nursing profession has evolved to address health, societal and person-centred care challenges (WHO, 2020). Advanced Practice Nursing roles have been recognised as a means of improving access to care and quality of care and potentially decreasing health care costs (Maier et al., 2017). Advanced Nursing Practice refers to a field of nursing that extends and expands the boundaries of the scope of practice of nursing, contributes to nursing knowledge and promotes the advancement of the profession. Moreover, Advanced Practice Nursing refers to advanced nursing interventions that influence clinical healthcare outcomes for individuals, families and diverse populations (WHO, 2020).

Globally, and also in the Nordic and Baltic countries, the development of the role of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) and their education has been supported by the International Council of Nurses' (ICN) definition of an APN. According to the International Council of Nurses (2008; 2020) all APNs are practitioners of nursing; provide safe and competent patient care; have their foundation in nursing education; have roles or levels of practice that require formal education beyond the preparation of registered nurses; have roles or levels of practice with increased levels of competency and capability that are measurable, beyond that of a generalist registered nurse; have acquired the ability to explain and apply the theoretical, empirical, ethical, legal, caregiving, and professional development required for Advanced Practice Nursing; have defined APN competencies and standards which are periodically reviewed for maintaining currency in practice, and are influenced by the global, social, political, economic and technological milieu (ICN, 2020). APN roles do not stand apart from nursing. Rather, the nursing core is what distinguishes them from those of non-nursing providers (Tracy & O'Grady, 2019). This chapter gives a brief overview of key Advanced Practice Nursing concepts and roles.

Key definitions

There is much variability in the use of Advanced Practice Nursing roles globally. A more precise understanding of the roles in place across the globe, how they are used and the outcomes being assessed would support greater role harmonisation and inform global priorities for Advanced Practice Nursing education, research and policy reform (Schumann et al., 2019; Ladd et al., 2020; Sastre-Fullana et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) refers to the field of nursing that extends and expands the boundaries of nursing's scope of practice, contributes to nursing knowledge and promotes the advancement of the profession. It is characterised by the integration and application of a broad range of theoretical and evidence-based knowledge (ICN, 2020.) The umbrella term describes an advanced level of clinical nursing practice and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations (Canadian Nursing Association, 2019).

Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) can be defined as a career pathway for registered nurses who are committed to continuing professional development and clinical supervision to practice at a higher level of capability as independent, autonomous and expert practitioners. The Advanced Practice Nurse role requires the application of relevant research and management of knowledge and skills to provide high-quality care, improve patient outcomes and ensure implementation of evidence-based practice (ICN, 2020; Casey & Connor, 2022). Advanced Practice Nursing promotes consistency in practice, achieving value-added patient outcomes and improving the healthcare delivery process (Tracy & O'Grady, 2019).

An Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) is a generalist or specialised nurse who has acquired, through post-graduate education (minimum of a master's degree), the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies needed for Advanced Nursing Practice. The role is shaped by the context in which the APN is credentialed to practice. (ICN, 2020.)

A Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) is an Advanced Practice Nurse who provides expert clinical advice and care based on established diagnoses in specialised clinical fields of practice, along with a systems approach to practicing as a healthcare team member. CNSs function as expert clinicians in a specialty and are leaders in advancing nursing

practice by teaching, mentoring, consulting and ensuring nursing practice is evidence-based/evidence-informed. (ICN, 2020.)

A Nurse Practitioner (NP) is an Advanced Practice Nurse who integrates clinical skills associated with nursing and medicine to assess, diagnose and manage patients in primary healthcare (PHC) settings and acute care populations as well as ongoing care for populations with chronic illness (ICN, 2020).

Current roles

According to the ICN (2020), the two most common APN roles are Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) and Nurse Practitioner (NP). Both roles have been identified in Nordic and Baltic countries; however, only the NP or CNS role exists in some countries, and the two roles can be mixed (Sulosaari et al., 2023). For both roles, the education requirements are the same; APNs are prepared through master's level academic studies and supervised practice to perform various complex tasks in patient care and the broader healthcare system (European Nursing Research Foundation, 2022). APNs have designated nursing roles that focus on providing care, illness prevention, and cures based on direct and indirect healthcare services at an advanced level, including rehabilitative care and chronic disease management. Their role is beyond the scope of practice of a generalist or specialised nurse. They can integrate research (evidence-based practice), education, leadership and clinical management (ICN, 2020). Bryant-Lukosius (2004, 2008) has clarified the essential distinctions between the CNS and NP roles, finding that the CNS focuses more on indirect care and supporting clinical excellence with a systems approach while the NP focuses more on direct patient care within diverse clinical settings.

The ICN (2020) has defined the key characteristics of CNSs and NPs as follows:

Clinical Nurse Specialist

- **Defined scope of practice in an identified specialty.**
- **Provides direct and indirect care to patients with an established diagnosis.**
- **Works within a specialist field of practice.**
- **Works in defined practice populations (e.g., oncology, pain management, cardiology).**
- **Works autonomously and collaboratively in a team, using a systems approach, with nursing personnel or other healthcare providers and healthcare organisations.**

- Frequently shared clinical responsibility with other healthcare professionals.
- Works as a consultant to nurses and other health care professionals in managing complex patient care problems.
- Provides clinical care related to an established differentiated diagnosis.
- Influences specialist clinical and nursing practice through leadership, education and research.
- Provides evidence-based care and supports nurses and other healthcare professionals to provide evidence-based care.
- Evaluate patient outcomes to identify and influence system clinical improvements.
- May or may not have some prescribing authority in a specialty. (ICN, 2020.)

Nurse Practitioner

- Comprehensive scope of practice specific to the NP with activities that include prescribing, diagnosis and treatment management.
- Commonly provides direct clinical care to patients with un-diagnosed conditions and ongoing care for those with an already established diagnosis.
- Works generically within a variety of fields of practice and settings.
- Works with multiple diverse practice populations.
- Works autonomously and in collaboration with other healthcare professionals.
- Assumes full clinical responsibility and management of their patient population.
- Conducts comprehensive, advanced health assessments and investigations to make differential diagnoses.
- Initiates and evaluates a treatment management plan following an advanced health assessment and investigation based on the conduct of differential diagnoses.
- Engages in clinical leadership, education and research.
- Provides evidence-based care.
- Frequently has the authority to refer and admit patients.
- Commonly has prescribing authority. (ICN, 2020.)

Trends

The position of Advanced Practice Nurse has evolved in many countries around the world in response to changing and more complex patient needs, inequitable access and provider shortages (Maier & Aiken, 2016). Thus, the development of Advanced Practice Nursing has faced

external challenges from other disciplines, such as medicine, and internal challenges within the domain of nursing. However, Advanced Practice Nursing roles are growing in many new areas (Poghosyan et al., 2022) and continue to answer the challenges of rapidly changing health care. Over the past several decades, research has shown that Advanced Practice Nurse-provided care is associated with positive patient outcomes and that these nurses add critical value across various healthcare settings (e.g., Swan et al., 2015; Aiken et al., 2021). Thus, although APNs can provide effective and high-quality care, they need enabling policy and work environments to ensure they can practice effectively (Poghosyan et al., 2022).

There are current and future opportunities for developing Advanced Practice Nursing into a new era of nursing. According to the ICN (2020), in order to support future potential for Clinical Nurse Specialists and Nurse Practitioners there is a need to continue to:

- Promote clarity of CNS and NP practice.
- Identify how these nurses contribute to the delivery of healthcare services.
- Guide the development of educational curricula specific to the CNS and NP.
- Support these nurses in establishing advanced practice (CNS or NP) roles and levels of practice.
- Offer guidance to employers, organisations and healthcare systems implementing the CNS and NP.
- Promote appropriate governance in terms of policy, legislation and credentialing. (ICN, 2020.)

The European Nursing Research Foundation (2022) recently published its recommendations for policymakers and nurse leaders.

Policymakers:

- Support APNs in establishing roles and advanced levels of practice, identifying and aligning guidelines for employers, organisations and health systems implementing Advanced Practice Nursing.
- Carry out more research into the opportunities of Advanced Practice Nursing, its impact and implementation strategies within countries.

Nurse leaders:

- Facilitate master's level education.
- Intensively guide the development of educational programmes specific to APNs (including CNSs and NPs) and support all countries in developing this professional pathway.

- Promote transparency, increase recognition with regulation within country regulatory systems and reduce variation.
- Demonstrate how APNs are leading and improving the quality of care. (European Nursing Research Foundation, 2022.)

Tools and Resources:

Organisations and networks:

ICN NP/APN network <https://www.icn.ch/who-we-are/npapn-network>
NHS England <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/advanced-clinical-practice/advanced-clinical-practice-toolkit>

Canadian Nurses Association <https://www.cna-aiic.ca/en/nursing/advanced-nursing-practice>

American Nurses Association <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/workforce/what-is-nursing/aprn/>

NACNS <https://nacns.org/>

AANP <https://www.aanp.org/>

APRN Consensus Work Group & the National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee Consensus Model for APRN Regulation.

https://www.bon.texas.gov/pdfs/forms_pdfs/applications_pdfs/aprn_pdfs/aprnmodel.pdf

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