

Chapter 4: Curriculum Design in APN Education

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Introduction

The position of Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) educator involves blending expertise in nursing science with effective teaching skills, similar to traditional nurse educators. Although a specific competency framework for APN educators is still in development, key elements include proficiency in curriculum development and the ability to integrate global knowledge with local needs. APN educators also need to show innovation skills, research capacity and leadership in order to continually enhance nursing education.

Responding to this need, the APN-EDU network has produced a comprehensive curriculum for APN educators. This curriculum aims to enhance APN educators' capacity to build, implement and evaluate degree programmes tailored to master's level Advanced Nursing Practice. By aligning with international standards and involving local stakeholders, the curriculum aims to develop educators capable of shaping the future of Advanced Practice Nursing education.

Competencies of APN educators, curriculum and programme

The specific competencies needed by APN educators have not been investigated, but they doubtless include both a solid theoretical knowledge foundation in nursing science and the practical teaching skills to apply theoretical information, similar to other nurse educators. Competency in curriculum development is also required, as is the capacity to analyse worldwide knowledge, nursing standards and guidelines, and national and local needs as foundations for the curriculum. Even though mastery of these competencies should be a basic requirement for APN educators, there are more features to consider. APN educators may be required to demonstrate innovation and research skills and be leaders and champions of continuous improvement in the nursing education field. After all, teachers must be

able to educate and guide APN students at an advanced level in order for them to truly attain the competencies targeted by the curriculum. (Nurse Educator..., 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2020; The Essentials..., 2021; Ye et al., 2022.)

In terms of health science teachers' and nurse educators' self-assessment of their competencies, a number of studies have found that they rate their level as excellent (Mikkonen et al., 2018; Vauhkonen et al., 2024). In the study by Vauhkonen et al. (2024) for example, nurse educators from four European nations typically rated their total competency level as excellent, with evidence-based practice ranked highest. In addition, they evaluated their pedagogical competency as high, and believed that they act according to ethical principles and can integrate theoretical knowledge into teaching practice. Despite good results, the educators thought their cultural competence needed to be strengthened. Similarly, in the review by Mikkonen et al. (2018), health science teachers evaluated themselves as highly competent in almost all areas of teaching competence. However, according to the review results it seems nursing students evaluated their teachers' competence significantly less positively than did the teachers themselves. Although APN teachers were not the target group of either investigation per se, the results can be applied to them as well. However, in order to strengthen APN educators' abilities, knowledge and attitudes, it is critical to obtain frequent feedback from students and colleagues in the quest for excellence.

Educators who teach future Advanced Practice Nurses are the driving force behind the development of qualified and capable APNs. Qualified educators are thus required to prepare nurses for challenging advanced clinical positions. For this reason, the APN-EDU network designed and delivered an intensive course for APN educators from the Nordic and Baltic countries (excluding Latvia) in 2023. At the beginning of the course, the network based its descriptions and definitions of core competencies for APN educators on the WHO's list of nursing educator competencies (Nurse Educator..., 2016). Later, the structure and implementation of the curriculum of the intensive course for educators was designed by highly experienced educators from the network. As a result, three different core competency areas, learning outcomes and sets of contents for the APN educator intensive course curriculum were documented. These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. APN educator curriculum

| Core Competency Areas | Learning Outcomes | Content (evidence-based practice and health promotion are embedded in curriculum) |
|--|---|--|
| <p>APN Curriculum</p> <p>WHO Nurse Educator Core Competencies numbers 1 and 2 (Nurse Educator..., 2016)</p> | <p>The APN educator</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) identifies and analyses current trends in Advanced Practice Nursing (e.g., e-health, variation of job descriptions, APN education) 2) identifies different attributes related to clinical decision making (CDM) and implements different strategies in the teaching process 3) composes/constructs systematic evidence-based tools to evaluate APN competency development during education | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) current trends in Advanced Practice Nursing at local, national and international level 2) contemporary theories of clinical decision making and clinical judgement and consultation <p>CDM teaching strategies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) different evidence-based competence assessment tools |
| <p>APN Clinical Nursing Practice</p> <p>WHO Nurse Educator Core Competency number 3 (Nurse Educator..., 2016)</p> | <p>The APN educator</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) possesses profound understanding of professional ethics and the scope of practice of APN in an international context 2) has mastered the contents and teaching methods related to health assessment and diagnosis and health promotion 3) comprehends the organisation of autonomous APN practice and independent appointment including planning, delivering and assessment of care in different health care settings 4) applies contemporary | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) professional ethics (marketing, pharmaceutical companies), collegiality, advocacy, accountability, boundaries, legal issues, ICN scope of practice 2) health assessment and diagnosis (health promotion at advanced level) 3) frameworks/methods of advanced counselling, suggested in-depth counselling content |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | theories and methodologies to increase students' understanding of clinical decision making, consultation and advanced counselling | |
| <p>APN Education Development and Evaluation</p> <p>WHO Nurse Educator Core Competencies numbers 4-8 (Nurse Educator..., 2016)</p> | <p>The APN educator</p> <p>1) possesses profound knowledge of tools, methods and indicators used to evaluate Advanced Practice Nursing</p> <p>2) initiates and engages in discussions on the development of APN in international and national contexts</p> <p>3) leads collaboration among interdisciplinary groups at the local level in in order to develop the scope of practice of APN</p> | <p>1) teaching methods and frameworks based on evidence-based practices</p> <p>2) tools, methods and indicators used in evaluation of Advanced Practice Nursing</p> <p>3) argumentation theories, reasoning and critical thinking in Advanced Practice Nursing, advanced teamwork and collaboration, different platforms for effective discussion in society and interdisciplinary groups</p> |

The intensive course, which was aimed at APN educators, was worth five ECTS credits and consisted of online learning and a contact week at Turku University of Applied Sciences in 2023. The pedagogical approach was based on adult learning principles and evidence-based teaching practices. The trainers (faculty) included experienced APN educators, preferably experienced researchers with doctoral degrees. As for the participants, the admission criteria included being a registered nurse with a master's (minimum 60 ECTS) or doctoral degree, possessing teaching qualifications/education and teaching experience, being involved in or intending to start teaching on a master's level APN programme and having clinical experience. In total, the one-week in-person intensive course consisted of ten expert lectures and five workshops, and participants were required to successfully complete both pre- and post-assigned tasks.

APN programme curriculum design

Developing competence-based curricula in APN nursing education is critical in order to guarantee that graduates have the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care. As such, designing curricula for

APN programmes involves reviewing the best evidence from international research on APN master's level education, analysing professional nursing standards and involving local stakeholders to guarantee alignment with evolving healthcare needs. (Arends, 2024.) In addition, European programmes must correspond to the master's level of the European Qualifications Framework, indicating the high level of knowledge and skills acquired by graduates (Descriptions of..., N.d.). Specifically, nurse educators should understand the role that international and national professional standards and guidelines have in curriculum development. The ICN, for example, published its Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing in 2020, in which the scope of practice, competency descriptions and professional standards for APN and APN education are described (Guidelines on... 2020).

In addition to the abovementioned elements, curriculum development also specifically took into account the competencies of Nurse Practitioners as specified by the International Council of Nurses (Guidelines on..., 2020 pp 19). These are the following:

1. Demonstrates safe and accountable Nurse Practitioner practice incorporating strategies to maintain currency and competence.
2. Conducts comprehensive assessments and applies diagnostic reasoning to identify health needs/problems and diagnoses.
3. Develops, plans, implements and evaluates therapeutic interventions when managing episodes of care.
4. Consistently involves the health consumer to enable their full partnership in decision making and active participation in care.
5. Works collaboratively to optimise health outcomes for health consumers/population groups.
6. Initiates and participates in activities that support safe care, community partnership and population improvements.

In addition, the core competencies, areas of autonomy and extended roles included in Nordic and Baltic countries' (excluding Latvia) APN programmes were evaluated by APN-EDU network participants (Sulosaari et al., 2023), and the results were taken into consideration when building the curriculum for APN educators. Table 2 presents the recommended core competencies included on the six different countries' APN programmes (Sulosaari et al., 2023).

Table 2. Comparison of APN programmes in Nordic-Baltic countries (Sulosaari et al., 2023)

| Core competencies (Gobbi & Kaunonen, 2018; Guidelines on..., 2020) | Areas of autonomy and extended roles | Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Iceland |
|--|--|--|
| Quality management and safety | 1) quality improvement 2) clinical audit and/or other quality assessment method | All All |
| Leadership | 3) leadership to facilitate and manage change 4) change management models and theories | All All |
| Education | 5) teaching others 6) mentorship, supervision, coaching 7) self-development, scholarship | All All All |
| Research | 8) research and development of evidence-based practice | All |
| Advocacy | 9) advocacy of health and social services 10) development of health care policies 11) role of the APN | All All All |
| Communication and collaboration | 12) interdisciplinarity and multiprofessionality within and outside the health sector | All |
| Direct holistic evidence-based care | 13) comprehensive health assessment 14) complex care (case) management, care coordination | All All |
| Case management | 15) chronic disease management 16) care monitoring and evaluation | All All |
| Health promotion | 17) improvement of physical, functional and psychological well-being of patients with acute or chronic conditions | All |
| Ethical decision making | 18) improvement of health promotion practices 19) rehabilitative care 20) specialty-specific procedures 21) education, guidance of patients, families 22) admission and discharge planning (health care settings and other services) | All All All All All |
| Clinical diagnostic, therapeutic treatment | 23) ordering diagnostic tests 24) making medical diagnoses | All Only in Lithuania |

Prescribing as part of APN

Prescribing medicines within one's own competence area is a central part of a Nurse Practitioners' scope of practice and full practice potential (Guidelines on..., 2020, pp 18). Prescriptive authority is always governed by country specific regulation. Nurse Practitioners commonly have prescriptive rights, while Clinical Nurse Specialists may or may not have some rights to prescribe within their specialty (Guidelines on..., 2020, pp 24).

Prescribing is defined in the Guidelines on Prescriptive Authority for Nurses (2021) as "An evolving process involving the steps of information gathering, clinical decision-making, communication and evaluation which results in the initiation, continuation or cessation of a medication. Prescribing is a complex process that requires in-depth understanding of clinical pharmacology and disease, clinical judgement to weigh the risks and benefits of a treatment and attention to detail, all within an unpredictable environment. Prescribing is clearly differentiated from the supply of medication or its administration to patients."

The ICN (2021) recommends that education curricula should be designed to the appropriate level and include the elements of the six competency areas described below to help nurses achieve the required knowledge, skills and behaviours. Competencies are also broken down into sub-competencies.

Competency Area 1: People-centredness in care

Competency Area 2: Evidence-based and informed practice

Competency Area 3: Communication and collaboration

Competency Area 4: Pharmacological essentials

Competency Area 5: Monitoring and review of a person's response to treatment

Competency Area 6: Professional practice.

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