

## Chapter 3: APNs Core Competences

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### Introduction

There are different models which describe competencies, and one of the standard APN competency models is Hamric's Integrative Model (Tracy et al., 2023). Hamric's Integrative Model of Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) is a comprehensive framework that describes the core competencies of Advanced Practice Nurses and the elements affecting advanced practice nursing.

In the Hamric model (Tracy et al., 2023), as well as in the agreement of the APN-EDU network member states (Sulosaari et al., 2023), the central competence of the Advanced Practice Nurse is direct clinical practice. According to Hamric's model (Tracy et al. 2023), five core competencies that support clinical practice are (1) guidance and coaching, (2) evidence-based practice, (3) leadership, (4) collaboration and (5) ethical practice.

This chapter provides an overview of the core competencies for Advanced Practice Nurses based on the Tracy et al. (2023) competency framework, the ICN Guidelines for Advanced Practice Nursing (2020) and the EQF Level 7 competency specification for nurses in clinical practice as described in the Tuning Calohee project (Gobbi & Kaunonen, 2023).

### Key definitions

**Competence** refers to the combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective and efficient functioning in everyday life and in a work environment. Competencies are categorised as follows:

- General Competencies (also known as transferable or common competencies): These competencies encompass knowledge, skills and

attitudes that have broad applicability and are not confined to any particular profession or industry. Individuals possessing general competencies can adapt to different and evolving environments, regardless of the specific field or context in which they operate.

- **Profession-Specific Competencies** (field-specific or field-functional competencies): These are tailored to a particular profession, industry or field of expertise. They encompass the knowledge, skills and attitudes directly relevant to tasks and requirements within that specific domain.
- **Core Competencies**: Core competencies represent a fusion of general and profession-specific competencies. They are central and indispensable capabilities required for effectively and efficiently performing tasks within a specific profession or area of expertise. Core competencies often serve as the foundation for an individual's professional expertise. These competencies are vital for achieving excellence in one's professional role.

**Learning outcomes** are measurable knowledge, skills or attitudes achieved due to learning. Competencies are assessed through learning outcomes based on assessment criteria.

## Core Competencies of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs)

**Central competence: Direct clinical practice.** The characteristics of advanced practice are shaped by the context in which nurses are credentialed to practice. The APN's practice of direct care as an expert in clinical work is characterised, according to Tracy & O'Grady (2023) by six features: (1) use of a holistic perspective, (2) formation of therapeutic partnerships with patients, (3) expert clinical performance, (4) use of reflective practice, (5) use of evidence as a guide to practice and (6) use of diverse approaches to health and illness management. In addition to providing individualised care, APNs promote the patient population's health in their specialty and improve the quality of care (Tracy et al., 2023.)

**Competency 1. Guidance and coaching.** APNs provide expert advice, guidance and coaching to patients, families and other health professionals, often in complex and specialised care areas, to engage them in changing their behaviour.

Description: This competency requires in-depth knowledge, skills and experience in the field. In addition, it includes both the general theoretical principles of professional communication and specific communication, of coaching and therapeutic techniques. APNs

educate, facilitate, support, promote and encourage the health and well-being of populations, groups, families and individuals. APNs effectively use various communication skills to advocate for and represent patients and colleagues.

**Competency 2. Evidence-based practice.** APNs are expected to integrate the best current evidence into their practice to ensure the highest quality of care.

*Description:* Use of quality standards and relevant theories in evidence-based practice for decision-making. APNs demonstrate the impact of and link between research and evidence-based practice in developing holistic patient-centred healthcare. APNs should critically evaluate contemporary evidence-based knowledge and develop and maintain cognitive competencies relevant to their specialty. They critically examine, evaluate, interpret and synthesise complex information and data sources to facilitate nursing practice and clinical decision-making. Their efficient and optimal use of modern medical equipment and technology is noteworthy, as is their ability to assess and critique practices in the use of technological applications, both in communication and in diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

**Competency 3. Leadership.** APNs promote and lead development-oriented change and debate developments in their sector in different healthcare and policy areas.

*Description:* Promotion of quality and evidence-based practices and fostering of change in the working environment to ensure good patient care. APNs contribute to development in the broader health sector and policy arena, including explaining, justifying and advocating for innovations in the field, using appropriate leadership styles and models, and demonstrating proficiency in strategic planning and change management to facilitate effective transitions. APNs can act as consultants and mentors, offering their expertise to other health professionals to improve patient care and outcomes. They can communicate and debate unambiguously and empoweringly on complex professional and academic nursing and nursing science issues with professionals and colleagues from other disciplines and the general public.

**Competency 4. Collaboration.** APNs work collaboratively with patients, families, other healthcare professionals and healthcare providers, ensuring comprehensive and integrated patient care.

*Description:* APNs plan, deliver and evaluate patient-centred care with patients, carers, families and other health and social care professionals, communicating unambiguously about complex professional and academic nursing and nursing science issues with other professionals and colleagues from other disciplines. This includes thorough documentation to report and refer for treatment in an interdisciplinary context. It is essential to understand organisational structures, communication processes, conflict resolution and negotiation skills.

**Competency 5. Ethical practice.** APNs act as role models in making ethical decisions in complex practice situations, which requires solid ethical principles and decision-making skills.

*Description:* APNs face complex ethical decisions in their practice, so it is essential that they receive orientation in professional, ethical, regulatory and legal standards to enable them to resolve moral and ethical dilemmas both in daily practice and in the public space. They act professionally in a holistic, tolerant, non-judgmental, caring and sensitive manner, ensuring that different individuals' and groups' rights, beliefs and wishes are not harmed. They demonstrate leadership in ethical deliberation and decision-making processes. APNs take responsibility for their own professional development and support the development of colleagues to improve quality of care and patient outcomes.

## References

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