

MY ROLE AS AN RN



Understanding and Communicating My Role as a Registered Nurse

By SUSANNE PRIEST

FROM RESEARCH DISCOVERIES OF DISEASES AND DRUGS, TO THE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES IN EQUIPMENT AND DOCUMENTATION SYSTEMS, TO CHANGING GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AND EMPLOYER POLICIES—THE ROLE OF THE REGISTERED NURSE (RN) IS IN A STATE OF CHANGE. HOWEVER, SINCE FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, ONE FACT REMAINS CONSTANT: RNS ARE TRUSTED, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND ETHICAL CAREGIVERS.

With the shrinking numbers of RNs in New Brunswick and the increase in the number of other nursing care providers (both regulated and unregulated), nursing activities that were once done solely by RNs are now being done by other nursing care team members. This may be perceived by some as role evolution and by others as a role identity crisis. Regardless of how it is perceived, RNs have an integral and valued role in the health care system. RNs carry out many activities such as: creating nursing knowledge, directing plans of care, determining and assigning the best nursing care provider to meet client needs, facilitating communication between healthcare providers, and transferring or coordinating client-care (Allen, 2015).

Creating Nursing Knowledge

Nursing care has always included activities that do not require direct client contact. Research reveals that up to 70% of what RNs do, is considered 'organizing work'—invisible work that is behind the scenes, but that requires critical thinking and professional skills (Allen, 2015). Decisions regarding the client's care are often made from the information and knowledge that the RN generated. RNs use critical inquiry to assess, plan, intervene and evaluate client care and related services (see the *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 2.1).

Knowledge is generated and questions are answered through collaborative discussions and nursing interventions such as: nursing assessments; scanning medical records and

lab results; medication reconciliation; critically thinking about the evidence; and capturing all of this in documentation. For example, an RN must decide what information is pertinent, what information to communicate with others and how to react to changing client health conditions, while prioritizing each known situation and the required interventions.

Directing Plans of Care

The creation and modification of individual plans of care for clients is a key aspect of RN care. Please review the document *Care Planning: An Essential Element of RN Practice* (NANB, 2020) for more information and considerations regarding care plans. Care planning supports the delivery of healthcare and involves developing the care plan, care coordination, and evaluation of client responses to healthcare interventions. The RN also engages in interprofessional, intraprofessional and intersectoral collaboration to promote comprehensive client care (see the *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 3.7).

Determining and Assigning the Best Nursing Care Provider to Client Needs

Allen (2015) wrote that the holy grail of healthcare is ensuring the right person is providing care to the right client at the right time and in a time effective and cost sensitive manner. RNs evaluate unit processes and care delivery practices to ensure the best use of human resources for positive client outcomes (see the *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 4.2). Assessment must always come before the assignment. The RN is responsible for knowing the status of the clients and the scopes of practice of the nursing care providers, when creating a shift assignment (see the *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 2.7) and to work collaboratively with the healthcare team (see the *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 4.7).

The NANB and the Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses have developed joint documents

to support RNs and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) to work collaboratively in providing nursing care. *Practice Guideline: A Collaborative Approach to Assigning, Delegating and Teaching in Health Care* (2019) and *Guidelines for Intraprofessional Collaboration: Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses Working Together* (2015) outline important concepts for the RN to consider when creating and modifying the nursing shift assignment, based on the following elements:

- the scope of practice and job description of the healthcare provider;
- the employer's policies;
- the individual healthcare provider's competency level;
- the client's condition (predictability, risk for negative outcome and complexity); and
- the practice environment.

Facilitating Communication Between Healthcare Providers

RNs facilitate communication between healthcare providers. This may include activities such as: attending rounds, facilitating client-family meetings, formulating and modifying a plan of care, making or modifying the nursing assignment and supervising the nursing care team. The RN coordinates resources within their control and communicates effectively with other team members to achieve safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care (see *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicators 4.2 and 4.3).

Transferring Care

From admission through to discharge and beyond, clients will receive care from multiple healthcare professionals. While the coordination of care provision is a shared responsibility, RNs are often responsible of care coordination

for a transfer into or out of a unit/facility. Discussion with other healthcare providers, including within the nursing care team, is another aspect of RN role. This is sometimes referred to as 'patient handover' and this can occur at change of shift, or when transferring a client from one unit to another. It can also be considered 'discharge planning', if the client is going home. For more information on handover see Fact Sheet: Handover of Care.

RNs must look backwards to summarize the care that was provided; must look to the present to see what are the current care needs; and must look forward in collaboration with the client, to plan what healthcare services are required or anticipated for optimal health (Allen, 2015) (see *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 3.6). These activities require knowledge of the determinants of health, the available resources and the ability to coordinate effectively.

Articulating the Importance of the RN Role

RNs make important contributions to client care and the healthcare system. RNs must understand and communicate their role to healthcare colleagues, clients and the public (see *Standards of Practice for RNs*, indicator 4.8). Being prepared to articulate the role of the RN will educate key decision makers, other health members of the healthcare team and the public regarding the role and the impact RNs have in healthcare.

The *Nurses Act* (2002) describes nursing as: "...the practice of nursing and includes the nursing assessment and treatment of human responses to actual or potential health problems and the nursing supervision thereof" (p. 3). The perceived negative is that there are no lists or concise parameters in which an RN can say this is where my scope of practice and nursing role, starts and stops. This is a broad definition with key elements such as: assessment, treatment, and supervision. From this

¹ Scope of practice describes the actions and processes that a healthcare professional is authorized, educated and competent to perform, while he/she practises within legislation, regulatory standards and employer policies

² Determinants of health: The health of individuals is determined by a person's social and economic factors, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviour. The determinants are income and social status; social support networks; education and literacy; employment/working conditions; social environments; physical environments; personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development; biology and genetic endowment; health services; gender; and culture (PHAC, 2018).

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of a learning plan, completion of a learning module, and recording learning activities from the past year of practice.

Piloting Nursing Program Approval Processes

NANB is piloting two new program approval processes in 2020; one with the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing and the UNB baccalaureate program; one with the College of Nurses of Ontario and the UdeM nurse practitioner program.

Nursing Resource Strategy

LPN to RN Bridging

The University of New Brunswick (UNB) has approached NANB for program approval for their LPN to RN bridging program (modelled after the Saint John campus program) and the Université de Moncton (UdeM) has been approved for funding for a bridging program.

Feasibility Study on the Role of RPNs

NANB was approached by the

Registered Psychiatric Nurse Regulators of Canada (RPNRC), and by the nursing regulatory body in Nova Scotia to determine interest in participating in a request for funding proposal that has potential for the conduct of a feasibility study regarding the role of RPNs in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. If funded, a provincial committee is required for oversight. NANB has reached out to potential participants for interest and availability. The proposal will be submitted in February and an update will be provided to the Board.

Entry to Practice Examination

The Board of Directors held a confidential session to discuss challenges in achieving an expert independent review of the new (CASN): Canadian Exam for Baccalaureate Nurses. Further work is scheduled on this important file.

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definition the RN role is versatile and encompassing, allowing for RNs and the profession of nursing to evolve and not dissolve, in order to meet the changing demands in healthcare.

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