



Advanced Level Nursing: A Position Statement

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Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
Background	3
Purpose	4
Principles	5
Advanced level nursing – a definition	7
Nationally agreed elements of advanced practice	9
1 Clinical/direct care practice	9
2 Leadership and collaborative practice	9
3 Improving quality and developing practice	10
4 Developing self and others	11
References	12
Annex: Advanced Practice Steering Group	14

Foreword

from Dame Christine Beasley, DBE, Chief Nursing Officer

I am delighted to commend this Advanced Practice Position Statement to you. The health and social care landscape has changed dramatically over the years and new roles have emerged to respond to the complex and wide-ranging needs of people, families and communities. The profession has adapted yet remained true to its core values.



In their report on Advanced Practice, the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence confirmed the need for a set of nationally agreed standards for advanced level practice in nursing to support employers and commissioners to establish good governance arrangements.

This statement responds to that need by defining the nature of advanced practice, what it encompasses and how it is different from the level of practice at registration. Furthermore, it applies to all nurses involved in direct care delivery who work at an advanced level regardless of area of practice, setting or client group. It describes a level of practice beyond that required to achieve registration.

This statement seeks to improve understanding of advanced level practice and will help practitioners, commissioners, educators, service and workforce planners achieve their aim of building services focused on improving outcomes and experiences for patients.

I am grateful to the hard work and commitment demonstrated by the members of the Steering Group, whose expertise, insight and judgement helped achieve the consensus required to develop this statement.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beasley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Introduction

This position statement describes the level of practice expected of nurses working at advanced level who provide direct care to patients, clients, service users or populations. It provides a benchmark for patients, carers, healthcare practitioners, managers, employers, commissioners and other stakeholders to use to make informed judgements regarding the required scope, level of practice and associated competence of nurses working at advanced level. This position statement is informed by the excellent work that has already been undertaken by a range of organisations to define and establish the competencies and standards for advanced practice in the UK and beyond (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council 2009; Canadian Nurses Association 2008; Department of Health 2004; International Council of Nurses 2008; Nursing and Midwifery Council 2004; Royal College of Nursing 2010; Scottish Government 2010; Skills for Health 2006). This work has been considered by focus groups comprising expert practitioners who agreed the themes and elements contained within this paper.

Background

The term 'advanced level practice' has been applied inconsistently to a number of different roles and this has often led to confusion about the scope and competence required at this level of practice. To date, there has been inconsistency in how the term has been applied to different nursing roles. During a recent review, the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence concluded that there was a continuing need for a set of nationally agreed standards for advanced level practice in nursing to support the provision of adequate employer/commissioner governance arrangements (Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence 2009).

Purpose

It is intended that this position statement should be used as a benchmark to enhance patient safety and the delivery of high-quality care by supporting local governance, assisting in good employment practices and encouraging consistency in the development of roles and posts. This position statement has been developed for nursing but it may also have relevance for advanced practice developments in midwifery, health visiting and allied health professions.

While advanced practice roles may differ, it is important that, during the role/post development process, organisations undertake a job evaluation exercise to ensure consistency, either by matching it to an existing national profile, or through a local evaluation system.

This statement recognises that there may be some elements of advanced practice within a variety of roles operating at different levels. However, a clinician working at an advanced level would be expected to demonstrate expertise in all of the elements highlighted below. This statement focuses on the nature of advanced level practice and does not seek to classify certain types of roles as advanced practice roles or specify pay structures.



Principles

Advanced Level Nursing: A Position Statement builds on and adds to the standards expected of a nurse on admission to the Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC) register. All registered nurses are bound by *The Code: Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics for Nurses and Midwives* (Nursing and Midwifery Council 2008). This position statement is therefore underpinned by the following assumptions:

- all registered nurses take personal responsibility for their actions and omissions, and fully recognise their personal accountability;
- all registered nurses are able to make sound decisions about their ongoing personal and professional development; practising within the scope of their personal professional competence and extending this scope as appropriate; delegating aspects of care to others and accepting responsibility and accountability for such delegation; and working harmoniously and effectively with colleagues, patients and clients and their carers, families and friends; and
- all registered nurses are expected to conduct themselves and practise within an ethical framework based upon respect for the well-being and safety of patients and clients.

The benchmark for advanced level nursing provided by this position statement is generic in that it applies to all clinical nurses working at an advanced level regardless of area of practice, setting or client group. It describes a level of practice, not specialty or role, that should be evident as being beyond that of first level registration.

The benchmark should be viewed as a minimum threshold. It comprises 28 elements clustered under the following four themes (as agreed by expert practitioners):

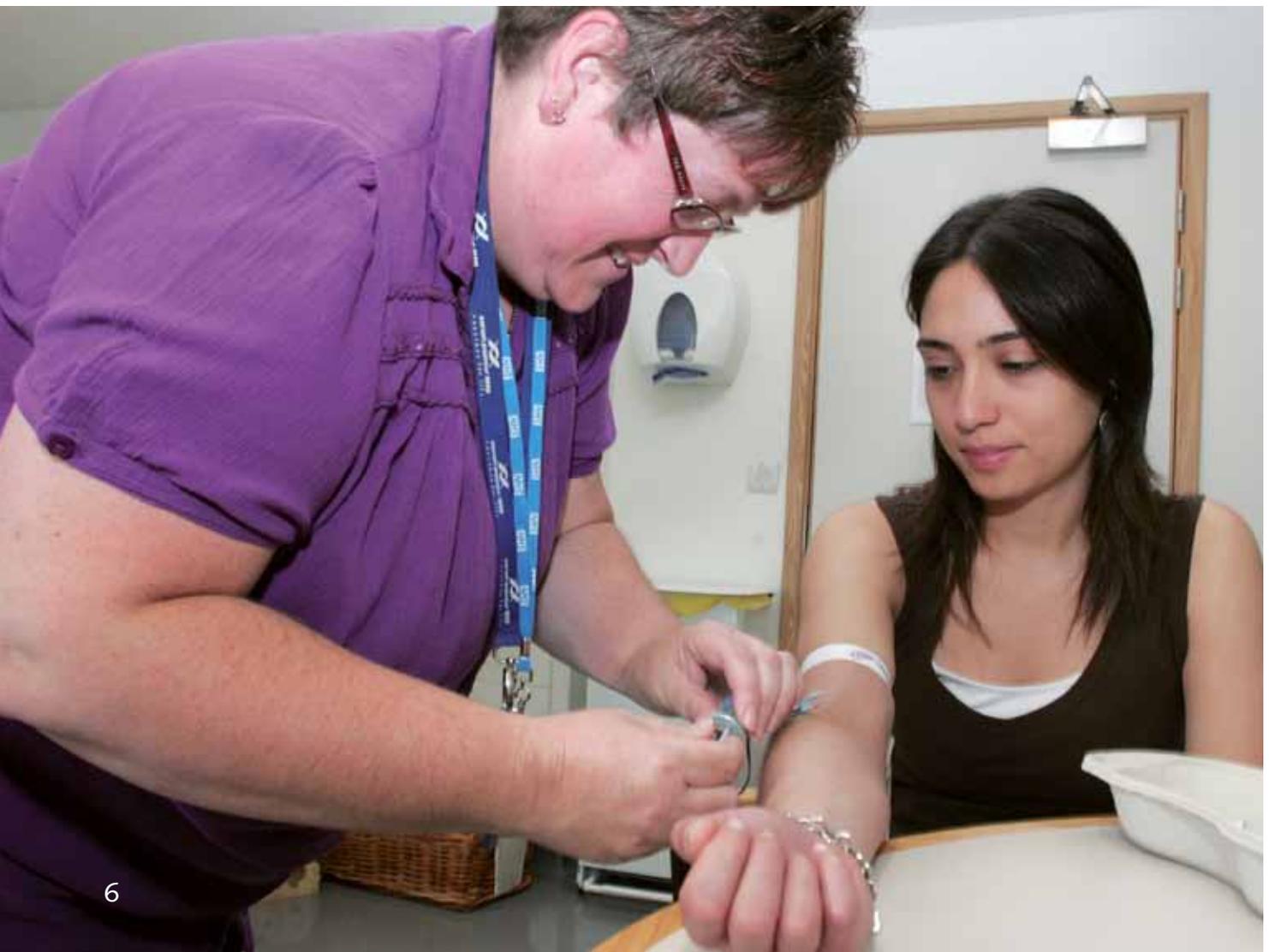
- clinical/direct care practice;
- leadership and collaborative practice;
- improving quality and developing practice; and
- developing self and others.

All four themes and their associated elements must be demonstrable within the nurse's current role. All registered nurses should be continuously developing their practice and so it is anticipated that nurses working at advanced level will develop their practice beyond this threshold.

The expectation is that nurses working at advanced level will have achieved this during extensive clinical/practice experience and following completion of Master's level education/learning or its equivalent (for example through Master's level postgraduate certificates/diplomas).

The learning and development requirements of individual advanced level nurses should be identified and supported through individual performance review, appraisal and revalidation requirements on an ongoing basis and alongside a robust clinical supervision framework.

Nursing is dynamic and therefore advanced level nursing is continually evolving. Consequently, this position statement will need periodic review to ensure that it reflects service needs, and innovation and developments in practice.



Advanced level nursing – a definition

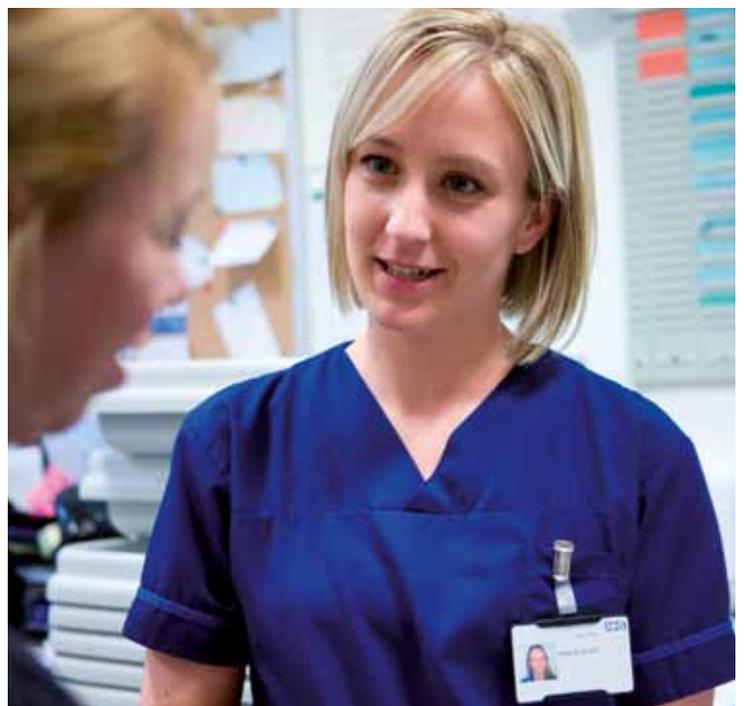
This statement recognises two levels of nursing practice: first level registration (entry into the profession) and advanced level, where the registered nurse is working at a level well beyond initial registration, using their existing knowledge and skills to inform and further develop their practice. Essential competences expected at the point of registration are therefore not included here. Similarly, specific tasks have not been highlighted because tasks do not define advanced level practice. For example, what were once considered to be extended role activities – such as intravenous drug administration and cannulation – now form, following relevant preparation, the expected skills base of all registered nurses working in areas where these are key elements of nursing practice.

Advanced level practice encompasses aspects of education, research and management but is firmly grounded in direct care provision or clinical work with patients, families and populations. Nurses working at an advanced level promote public health and well-being. They understand the implications of the social, economic and political context of healthcare. Their expertise, experience and professional and clinical judgement are demonstrated in the expert nature of their practice and the depth of their knowledge. Patients, clients and other professionals acknowledge their highly developed and extensive knowledge in areas such as diagnostics, therapeutics, the biological, social and epidemiological sciences and pharmacology, and their enhanced skills in areas such as consultation and clinical decision-making. Nurses working at an advanced level use complex reasoning, critical thinking, reflection and analysis to inform their assessments, clinical judgements and decisions. They are able to apply knowledge and skills to a broad range of clinically and professionally challenging and complex situations.

Nurses working at advanced level act as practice leaders, they manage their own workload and work across professional, organisational, agency and system boundaries to improve services and develop practice. They network, locally, regionally and nationally. They assess and manage risk and proactively challenge others about risk.

Advanced level nursing involves constantly working to improve the quality of services and patient care. Advanced level nurses use a range of data, tools and techniques to improve practice and health outcomes and can demonstrate their impact and value. They develop productive relationships with numerous stakeholders in order to influence the strategic direction of services for the benefit of patients and clients.

Nurses working at advanced level are at the forefront of their area of practice. They can identify their own and others' personal development needs and take effective action to address them. They are likely to have made best use of the wide range of learning and development opportunities available to them, learning not only through formal educational programmes but also from their own practice and from the individuals with whom they work. Such nurses will have a track record of innovative practice and service development, for example taking a lead in designing and delivering new care pathways and services and in the development and implementation of policy, standards, guidelines and protocols.



Nationally agreed elements of advanced practice

1 Clinical/direct care practice

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 1.1 practise autonomously and are self-directed;
- 1.2 assess individuals, families and populations holistically using a range of different assessment methods, some of which may not be usually exercised by nurses such as physical examination, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests or advanced health needs assessment;
- 1.3 have a health promotion and prevention orientation, and comprehensively assess patients for risk factors and early signs of illness;
- 1.4 draw on a diverse range of knowledge in their decision-making to determine evidence-based therapeutic interventions (which will usually include prescribing medication and actively monitoring the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions);
- 1.5 plan and manage complete episodes of care, working in partnership with others, and delegating and referring as appropriate to optimise health outcomes and resource use, as well as providing direct support to patients and clients;
- 1.6 use their professional judgement in managing complex and unpredictable care events and capture the learning from these experiences to improve patient care and service delivery;
- 1.7 draw upon an appropriate range of multi-agency and inter-professional resources in their practice; and
- 1.8 appropriately define the boundaries of their practice.

2 Leadership and collaborative practice

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 2.1 identify and implement systems to promote their contribution and demonstrate the impact of advanced level nursing to the healthcare team and the wider health and social care sector;

- 2.2 provide consultancy services to their own and other professions on therapeutic interventions, practice and service development;
- 2.3 are resilient and determined and demonstrate leadership in contexts that are unfamiliar, complex and unpredictable;
- 2.4 engage stakeholders and use high-level negotiating and influencing skills to develop and improve practice;
- 2.5 work across professional, organisational and system boundaries and proactively develop and sustain new partnerships and networks to influence and improve health, outcomes and healthcare delivery systems;
- 2.6 develop practices and roles that are appropriate to patient and service need through understanding the implications of and applying epidemiological, demographic, social, political and professional trends and developments; and
- 2.7 identify the need for change, proactively generate practice innovations and lead new practice and service redesign solutions to better meet the needs of patients and the service.

3 Improving quality and developing practice

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 3.1 are proactively involved in developing strategies and undertaking activities that monitor and improve the quality of healthcare and the effectiveness of their own and others' practice;
- 3.2 strive constantly to improve practice and health outcomes so that they are consistent with or better than national and international standards through initiating, facilitating and leading change at individual, team, organisational and system levels;
- 3.3 continually evaluate and audit the practice of self and others at individual and systems levels, selecting and applying valid and reliable approaches and methods which are appropriate to needs and context, and acting on the findings;
- 3.4 continually assess and monitor risk in their own and others' practice and challenge others about wider risk factors;
- 3.5 critically appraise and synthesise the outcomes of relevant research, evaluations and audits and apply the information when seeking to improve practice;

- 3.6 plan and seize opportunities to generate and apply new knowledge to their own and others' practice in structured ways which are capable of evaluation;
- 3.7 alert appropriate individuals and organisations to gaps in evidence and/or practice knowledge and, as either a principal investigator or in collaboration with others, support and conduct research that is likely to enhance practice; and
- 3.8 use financial acumen in patient/client, team, organisational and system level decision-making and demonstrate appropriate strategies to enhance quality, productivity and value.

4 Developing self and others

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 4.1 actively seek and participate in peer review of their own practice;
- 4.2 enable patients/clients to learn by designing and coordinating the implementation of plans appropriate to their preferred approach to learning, motivation and developmental stage;
- 4.3 develop robust governance systems by contributing to the development and implementation of evidence-based protocols, documentation processes, standards, policies and clinical guidelines through interpreting and synthesising information from a variety of sources and promoting their use in practice;
- 4.4 work in collaboration with others to plan and deliver interventions to meet the learning and development needs of their own and other professions;
- 4.5 advocate and contribute to the development of an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development, evidence-based practice and succession planning; and
- 4.6 have high-level communication skills and contribute to the wider development of those working in their area of practice by publicising and disseminating their work through presentations at conferences and articles in the professional press.

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Annex: Advanced Practice Steering Group

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