Registered nurse professional practice in Queensland

Guidance for practitioners, employers and consumers

December 2013

Queensland
Government

Registered nurse professional practice in Queensland

Published by the State of Queensland (Queensland Health), December 2013

For more information contact:
Nursing and Midwifery Office, Queensland, Department of Health, GPO Box 48, Brisbane QLD 4001, email ChiefNurse-Office@health.qld.gov.au, phone 3328 9659.

An electronic version of this document is available at http://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/nmoq.

Disclaimer:
The content presented in this publication is distributed by the Queensland Government as an information source only. The State of Queensland makes no statements, representations or warranties about the accuracy, completeness or reliability of any information contained in this publication. The State of Queensland disclaims all responsibility and all liability (including without limitation for liability in negligence) for all expenses, losses, damages and costs you might incur as a result of the information being inaccurate or incomplete in any way, and for any reason reliance was placed on such information.

Contents

Figures

Introduction

The registered nurse is central to the provision of safe, high quality nursing care and the backbone of the healthcare system. They make up more than 50 per cent of clinical roles across the Queensland public healthcare sector.

The role of the registered nurse changes and adapts as the healthcare system responds to significant challenges, such as an ageing and growing population, and the increasing prevalence and incidence of chronic disease. Ongoing service pressures will place greater stress on our healthcare system to meet consumer and patient needs, and expectations within finite resources.

The Queensland Government, health policy-makers and service managers are already implementing reforms to ensure healthcare professionals are best placed to meet future service requirements, these include:

- implementing innovative patient flow and clinical redesign strategies
- providing additional investment and incentives to meet emergency and waiting list targets
- developing new models of care to provide increased value-for-money and meet national efficient price levels.

Given the prominent role of the registered nurse, the success of any health initiative will be directly influenced by the extent to which the nursing workforce is enabled to consistently practise to its full scope of practice. It is crucial registered nurses seek and develop new roles to meet patient needs without compromising quality outcomes.

Health professionals must be more dynamic, flexible, agile and responsive to provide the health services that are and will be needed. Success will rely on nursing leaders as well as individual registered nurses sharing in this vision for the future.

This paper identifies key elements relevant to registered nurses practicing to their full scope. A practice framework is provided to inform individual registered nurses and service providers how to support and deliver effective, high-quality nursing and healthcare. The framework supports innovation, creativity and the development of knowledge and practise to support new ways of delivering quality healthcare.

The primary focus of this paper is on the registered nurse role. In articulating this role, and with respect to other key issues, it is acknowledged and recognised that:

- industrial frameworks, including career classification structures, that impact on the employment of registered nurses do not take precedence over the practice pathway nor impact on the ability to practise to their full potential
- within the nursing profession, the role of a registered nurse in a clinical setting is supported by the work of the nursing executive, nurse practitioners, educators, managers, enrolled nurses, assistant nurses and student nurses
- contemporary models of care are often delivered through multidisciplinary teams comprising a range of health professions with complementary skills focused on delivering timely, quality care.

Regulation of registered nurses

Professional framework

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) is responsible for professional regulation and sets the standards, codes and guidelines for the nursing and midwifery professions in Australia. The role of professional colleges and associations in developing specific standards of practice and credentialing individual nurses is increasing.

Registered nurses are individually accountable for their own practice and have a personal responsibility to maintain their competency and meet professional standards in order to maintain their licence to practise. The role of the registered nurse has evolved with changes in advancing technology, newly defined client needs and changes in the way healthcare is delivered. In this way, it is not unreasonable to expect that the role of the registered nurse will continue to evolve and change.

It is important registered nurses, consumers, and employers understand that nursing practice has a rigorous safety and quality framework that is regulated, endorsed and monitored by the NMBA. This regulatory framework ensures high standards of care.

The framework includes:

- *National competency standards for the registered nurse*
- *Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia*
- *Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia*
- *Nursing and midwifery professional indemnity insurance arrangements registration standard*
- *Nursing and midwifery continuing professional development registration standard*
- *Nursing and midwifery recency of practice registration standard*
- *National decision—making framework*
- *A nurse's guide to professional boundaries*
- *Guidelines for mandatory notifications under the National Law*.

Further information:

- Standards
  www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx

Codes, guidelines and statements
www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements.aspx

Decision-making framework

Decision-making within a sound risk management, professional, regulatory and legislative framework is a considered and rational process that enables nurses to work to their full potential and scope of practice (NMBA 2007).

The *National decision making framework* (NMBA 2007) provides guidance and support to the nursing profession. Use of the framework enables the registered nurse's scope of practice to be extended and expanded safely.

Broadly, the registered nurse is responsible for assessing, planning, implementing, directing, supervising and evaluating direct and indirect nursing care.

This includes:

- providing actual nursing care
- supervising enrolled nurses and unregulated carers
- taking ownership of their own delegation decisions.

Scope of practice

A profession's scope of practice is the full spectrum of roles, functions, responsibilities, activities and decision-making capacity that individuals within that profession are educated, competent and authorised to perform and is determined by the profession itself (NMBA 2007).

Registered nurses practising to their full potential have the ability to transform services and care delivery and enable clients to meet their health and wellness needs. It is important registered nurses' understand the role they play in the delivery of health services—this is fundamental to quality healthcare.

Individual nurses may have specific capabilities that are influenced by factors, such as:

- practice context
- wider environment
- legislation
- health service policy
- education level
- standards
- health needs of the population (ANMC 2009).

These are not defined in the scope of practice of their profession, but rather by the level of education and experience of the individual nurse. Decisions about both the individual's and the profession's practice can be guided by the use of the *National decision making framework* (NMBA 2007).

Other factors impacting on scope of practice

While legislation, standards and other regulatory controls determine the overall scope of practice and the boundaries for registered nurses, other factors such as organisational arrangements influence the practise of the individual registered nurse.

These are:

- health needs of the client
- context of practice, including clinical governance arrangements
- capability—based on education level of the individual

- clinical knowledge, research and evidence-based practice.

Optimising the registered nurse contribution to health is not solely related to the incorporation of a particular skill or activity, but to the complex interplay of professional attributes, experience, learning, scientific knowledge and critical thinking. It is also impacted by elements across the context of practice and the degree to which those elements are supportive of the nursing scope of practice.

Certain factors on the practice pathway can enable or restrict the registered nurse performing to their full scope of practice. In order to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of health service, enablers need to be amplified and barriers challenged or removed.

Highlighting how these factors can shape a registered nurse's contribution to health provides opportunities to optimise their contribution. A range of these factors are detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1   Barriers and enablers to nursing practice
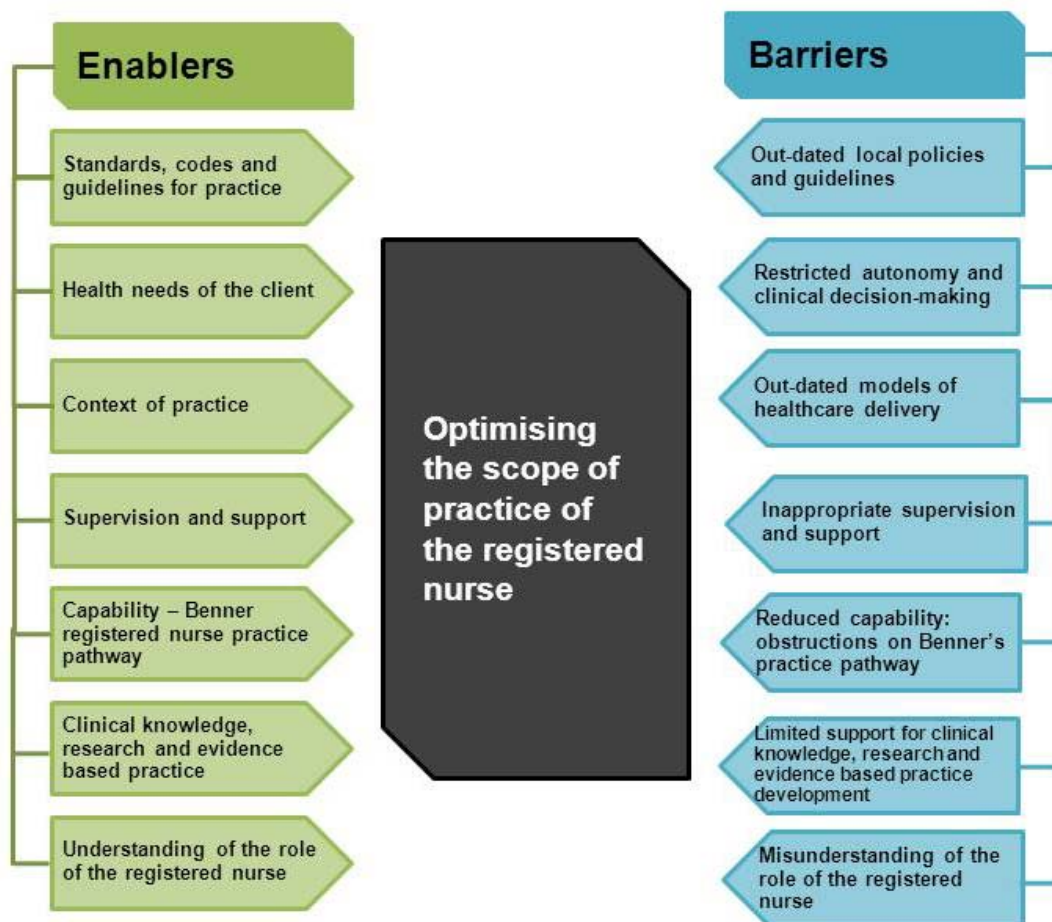
Continuing education and professional development

Continuing education and professional development is the key to the registered nurse contribution to health and development of their professional pathway throughout their career. Experience in the absence of ongoing education, professional development, governance and support will not develop practice that increases the individual's capability.

Each step in the registered nurse practice pathway builds on previous education, experience and the development of practice knowledge, competence and confidence in practice. The registered nurse is expected to undertake post graduate university programmes as part of advancement and development of their practice.

The initial education program for entry to practise that a registered nurse must complete is designed to develop assessment and problem solving skills and enable the graduate nurse to manage resources to deliver complex physical, psychological and behavioural care in a lawful and ethical manner.

Registered nurses are required to contribute to education and research, practise nursing that is underpinned by nursing theories and continually develop practice through translation of evidence into clinical practice.

Benner's practice pathway

Benner (1984) proposed that nursing knowledge develops through research and integration into clinical practise and experience. Importantly, experience is not a time based activity, but can only develop in the context of education and knowledge acquisition. Characteristics acquired throughout the registered nurse professional career contribute towards a sustainable profession through:

- role modelling
- clinical leadership
- mentoring and coaching
- supervision
- teaching
- research.

For the purpose of this paper, increasing capability of the registered nurse will be aligned to Benner's novice to expert model. Benner's model describes five levels of nursing capability and capacity and states that nursing skills increased and developed over time depending on experience and education.

Benner's five levels comprise of:

1. Novice—a beginner with no experience, behaviour is rule governed, limited and inflexible.
2. Advanced beginner—has gained prior experience in actual situations and is able to recognise recurring meaningful components. Principles based on experiences begin to be formulated to guide actions.

3. Competent—plans own actions based on analytic thinking, achieves efficiency and organisation.

4. Proficient—holistic decision making, able to modify plans based on learning from experience.

Expert—intuitive knowing in clinical situations with flexible highly proficient performance.

Pathway to optimised practice

Building on the identified guiding principles, the *Australian qualification framework*, Benner's model, and with consideration of enablers and barriers to practice, Figure 2 represents an idealised pathway through which the optimisation of nursing will be achieved.

Figure 2   Pathway to optimised practice

Note: timeline is an indicative guide only.
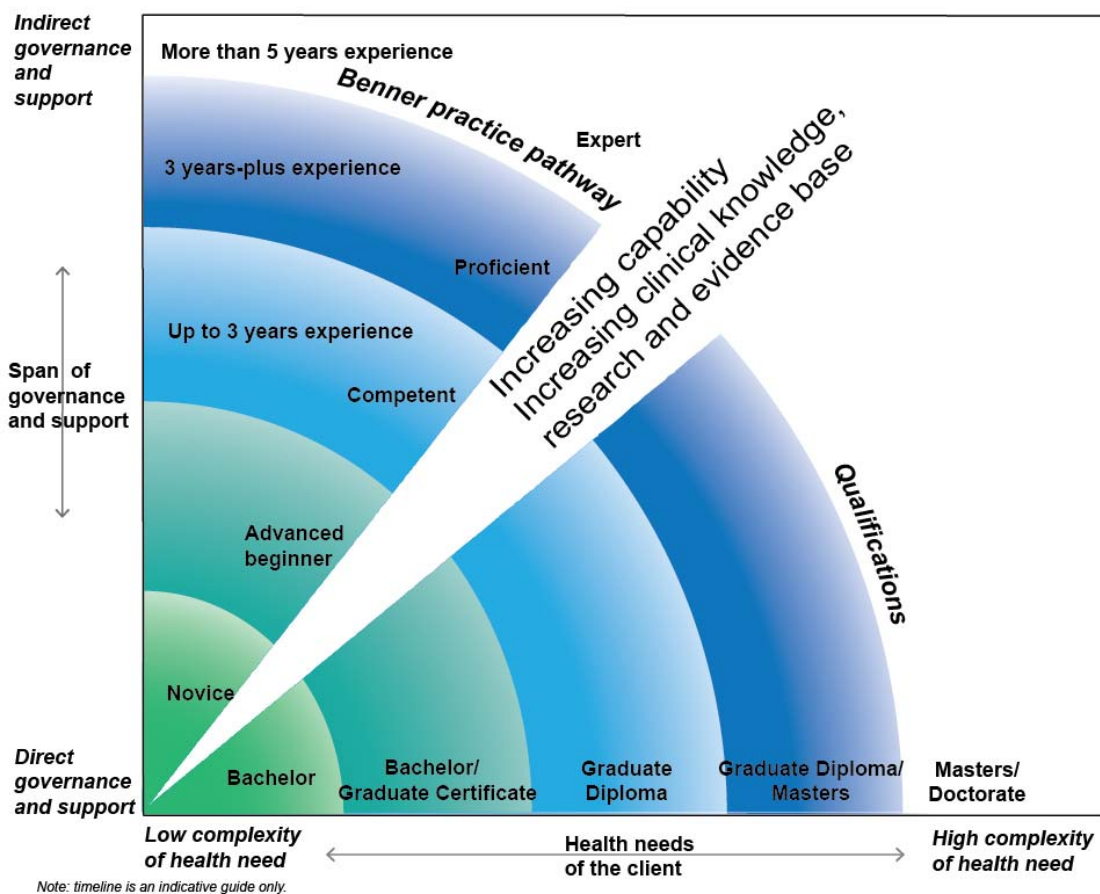
Optimised practise can be achieved at each progression point through Benner's practice pathway. The novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert registered nurse is able to optimise their practise regardless of whether they intend to continue along the practice pathway or if they are professionally and personally content with their current role.

Figure 2 details that the role the registered nurse assumes will depend on their initial nursing qualification for initial registration (for clarity Figure 2 does not reflect entry to practise Masters level qualifications), specialised post graduate education qualifications, informal training and clinical experiences.

Following initial registration, the novice is able to focus on continued professional development and post graduate qualifications relevant to identified areas of specialisation and/or contexts of practice. Additional education and experience builds greater competency so eventually, the novice becomes the advanced beginner, who in turn moves through being competent to proficient and finally to expert. At the expert level, the registered nurse is able to provide care to patients with complex health needs and requires only indirect governance and support.

Throughout the journey across the practice pathway, the registered nurse is protected by significant safety and quality frameworks which are themselves underpinned by evolving legislation, registration standards, professional practice standards and policies that align with best practice and evidence.

Future roles and models

Through the effective use of the professional and regulatory frameworks, informed through post graduate education and relevant experience, registered nurses can lead service transformation. Possible examples of new ways of working and new models of care may include:

- nurse proceduralists undertaking new diagnostic functions, such as endoscopy
- nurse-led clinics delivering integrated care to palliative care patients
- nurse triage models to streamline referral pathways into outpatient and specialist services
- public-private partnerships for nurse practitioners, including admission privileges, that enhance consumer choice
- registered nurses working in sustainable and economically viable self-employment models focused on community chronic disease management
- brokerage and community case management for disability clients through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- nurses delivering care and ongoing management to rural and remote patients through outreach services delivered through use of technology and Telehealth.
- expanded access to diagnostics and medicines to improve the patient journey and deliver services closer to a patient's home.

Moving forward

Registered nurses are well positioned to take advantage of reform priorities as they are at the forefront of care across the health continuum, supporting health promotion, and delivering acute, community-based and primary healthcare (Queensland Health 2013 & Department of Health 2013). The health reform environment will create opportunities for nurses to work in new models of healthcare delivery that provide quality health

services to individuals, families and communities and enable nurses to practise to their full professional potential (North & Hughes 2012).

The registered nurses' professional frameworks and practice pathway provides the bedrock to ensure the safe, high quality nursing care of the future. These robust frameworks are crucial in supporting the *Strengthening health services through optimising nursing strategy and action plan (2013–12016)* and in meeting the *Blueprint for better healthcare in Queensland's* commitment for all clinicians to work to the full scope of practice. Realisation and enablement of registered nurses to practise to their full potential will require all sectors of the healthcare system to reflect on the traditional perspectives of how health has worked, and understand that health will need to work in very different ways both now and into the future (Queensland Health 2013 & Department of Health 2013).

An optimised nursing workforce will result in increased levels of personal, professional and career satisfaction as well as recognise and reinforce the important contribution of the registered nurse to the healthcare system. Ultimately, a high performing, efficient healthcare system will result in the best patient outcomes for Queenslanders.

References

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2009) *Continuing competence framework for nurses and midwives*, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Canberra.

Australian Qualification Framework Council (2013) *Australian qualifications framework*, Australian Qualification Framework Council, South Australia.

Benner, P (1984) *From novice to expert: excellence and power in clinical nursing practice*, Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley.

Department of Health (2013) Strengthening health services through optimising nursing strategy and action plan (2013–2016), Department of Health, Brisbane.

North, N & Hughes, F (2012) A systems approach to nursing productivity, *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, vol. 26:2.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (2007) *A national framework for the development of decision making tools for nursing and midwifery practice*, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, Melbourne.

Queensland Health (2013) *Blueprint for better healthcare in Queensland*, Queensland Health, Brisbane.

Department of Health
Registered nurse professional practice in Queensland
www.health.qld.gov.au