The College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (CRNNS) recognizes clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) as integral contributors within Nova Scotia’s healthcare system.

**The College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia believes that:**

- Nurse practitioners (NPs) and clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) are currently the two recognized advanced practice nursing roles in Nova Scotia.
- Graduate education in nursing (e.g., a Masters or Doctorate degree) is the minimum educational preparation required for advanced nursing practice and provides the advanced knowledge and skills in leadership, critical thinking, synthesis and analysis of evidence, utilization, and generation of research and theory that is integral to the NP and CNS roles.
- Advanced practice nurses are responsible for their actions within the legislative, professional and ethical standards established by the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (CRNNS).
- Advanced practice nurses are accountable to be aware of their individual scope of practice and to consult and/or refer clients to other healthcare providers as required.
- Advanced practice nurses work within one or more of the five domains of practice (e.g., practitioner, consultant, educator, researcher, and leader) and utilize collaborative approaches in addressing the holistic needs of clients. The percentage of time spent in each domain varies depending upon the needs of the client population being served.
- Both the NP and CNS role focus on client needs across the health care continuum, including a focus on health promotion and disease prevention.
- Clinical nurse specialists are registered nurses with advanced nursing knowledge and skills, advanced judgment and clinical experience within a focused area of care, such as oncology, women’s health, gerontology or mental health.
- Nurse practitioners have a legislated scope of practice that expands upon the scope of the registered nurse and require additional regulation. The title ‘NP’ is protected in Nova Scotia, therefore only registered nurses who demonstrate the competencies for nurse practitioner practice and meet the regulatory requirements of the College can be licensed as an NP and use this title.

**Background**

Nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists are considered advanced practice nurses and are defined as “registered nurses (RNs) who have acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice” (DiCenso, et al., 2010, p. 150). This expanded practice, referred to as advanced nursing practice, enhances access to effective, integrated and coordinated health services. Grounded in nursing theory and values, the advanced nursing practice focuses on a holistic person-centered approach. Advanced practice nurses strive to meet the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations in a variety of contexts and practice settings, such as community based primary care, family practice clinics, long term care, hospital-based acute care or specialty roles.
An essential component of advanced nursing practice is the capacity to expand the boundaries of nursing practice and to effect system changes in health care. As autonomous professionals, advanced practice nurses are accountable for nursing and health services provided independently, both within their focus of practice and in collaboration with other members of the healthcare team. While different practice settings and client populations may require unique skills, there is a set of core competencies that is integral to all advanced nursing practice. The cornerstone of advanced nursing practice is clinical expertise working with client populations with complex needs. This requires integration of appropriate evidence-based practice, as well as knowledge and experience in health promotion and maintenance, teaching, communicating, counseling, illness and injury prevention, management of acute and chronic health conditions and supportive, rehabilitative and palliative care. In addition to clinical expertise and research, the advanced nursing practice role incorporates competencies related to leadership, education, consultation and collaboration (CNA, 2008).

**Clinical Nurse Specialists**

Clinical nurse specialists “positively impact the delivery of healthcare services by using expert knowledge and skills that are specific to their area of practice, and integrating competencies as a clinician, educator, researcher, consultant and leader” (Kilpatrick, DiCenso, Bryant-Lukosius, Ritchie, Martin-Misener, & Carter, 2011, p. 7). They utilize advanced assessment skills in the integration of the social determinants of health and nursing science which guides expert nursing practices and holistically addresses client needs. Clinical nurse specialists lead the development of clinical guidelines and protocols and promote the use of evidence, provide expert support and consultation and facilitate system change (ARNNL, 2013; CNA, 2009; Hamric, Spross & Hanson, 2009). They utilize clinical knowledge, collaboration, expertise and leadership and assist in providing solutions to complex healthcare issues with clients, families, nursing colleagues, other members of the healthcare team, health administrators and policy-makers. Clinical nurse specialists advance the profession by contributing to the development of nursing knowledge and evidence-based practice and by promoting excellence in clinical practice (CNA, 2009).

Although CNSs must have a graduate degree in nursing, the scope of their practice is considered within the scope of registered nursing practice and does not require additional regulation or separate licensure.

**Nurse Practitioners**

Utilizing their advanced knowledge and skills in the biological and psychosocial aspects of health and disease, NPs provide a broad range of essential health services, including comprehensive health assessment, health promotion, disease prevention and management of acute and chronic illnesses. Within their scope of practice, they have the legislated authority to order and interpret diagnostic tests, perform treatments and procedures and prescribe pharmaceuticals while working in collaboration with clients, physicians and other healthcare professionals. They communicate with clients about health assessment findings, diagnoses, further required testing, and potential courses of treatment and their implications. When necessary, nurse practitioners refer clients to other healthcare professionals, services and programs. They work closely with clients to help them make informed decisions about their health and to develop and monitor an appropriate plans of care. As they perform these activities, nurse practitioners have a responsibility to consider issues of resource allocation and cost-effectiveness in accordance with federal and provincial policy and legislation (CNPI, 2006; CRNNS, 2011).

In addition to their role in clinical care, nurse practitioners have the knowledge and skills to play a broader role in the healthcare system and society at large. They have the expertise to assess population health, evaluate health outcomes and develop health policies and health services. Nurse practitioners provide leadership to multi-stakeholder efforts in order to design,
implement and evaluate strategies aimed at promoting health and preventing illness and injury. Nurse practitioners participate in research that contributes to the development of nursing knowledge and evidence-based practice.

**Outcomes of Advanced Nursing Practice**

Advanced nursing practice roles have evolved to meet the demands of modern healthcare and evidence demonstrates positive health outcomes for clients and the healthcare system when these roles are in place.

Bryant–Lukosius (2004) found that advanced practice nurses improve client and healthcare system outcomes related to health status, functional status and quality of life, as well as satisfaction with care and cost efficiency.

The CRNNS’s most recent update on nurse practitioner-sensitive outcomes identifies evidence that NPs continue to improve access to care, reduce lengths of hospital stays and reduce costs to the healthcare system. Client outcomes from NP care are consistently comparable to those from physicians, and collaboration between NPs and other providers (e.g., physicians, paramedics) produce positive outcomes. Client satisfaction with NP care remains high (CRNNS, 2014).

The registered nurse-sensitive outcomes update provides evidence that clinical nurse specialists improve patient outcomes in specific client populations (e.g., reduced emergency room visits for asthmatics, improved prenatal care, decreased complications for cancer patients, and shortened hospital stays). They also provide valuable leadership in the clinical environment by promoting research utilization, guiding policy development and mentoring fellow staff (Fulton & Baldwin, 2004, DiCenso, et al., 2010).

**Integration of Advanced Nursing Practice**

The nursing profession, nurse educators, health organizations and both federal and provincial governments all play a key role in supporting the continued evolution and integration of advanced nursing practice into the healthcare system. All stakeholders have a responsibility to create an environment that supports advanced nursing practice roles by:

- promoting and supporting continual learning and research
- facilitating and fostering interprofessional and intraprofessional collaboration
- establishing nursing models of practice that support advanced nursing practice
- supporting autonomy and accountability for advanced practice nurses
- valuing and recognizing the optimized scope of practice and competencies of advanced practice nurses
- contributing to a culture of quality improvement and evidence-based care
- recognizing the contribution advanced nursing practice makes to client outcomes
- creating partnerships with educational institutions
- providing resources for registered nurses to participate in advanced nursing practice programs
- valuing the level of educational preparation required for the advanced nursing practice role

**Summary**

The full integration of advanced nursing practice into the healthcare system calls for the nursing profession to take a leadership role in providing a framework for advanced nursing practice and in creating partnerships to support this level of practice. As government, health organizations and the public continue to explore ways of enhancing healthcare delivery, advanced practice nurses can help design a more coordinated, integrated and seamless health system by articulating and demonstrating their contributions to the system. This calls for leadership and collaborative partnerships to act in the interest of the public while maintaining the integrity of the nursing profession.
References


