

What is a Registered Nurse?

Registered Nurses

“Registered nurses (RNs) are self-regulated health care professionals who work autonomously and in collaboration with others. RNs enable individuals, families, groups, communities and populations to achieve their optimal level of health. RNs coordinate health care, deliver direct services and support clients in their self-care decisions and actions in situations of health, illness, injury and disability in all stages of life. RNs contribute to the health care system through their work in direct practice, education, administration, and research, and policy in a wide array of settings” (CNA, 2007 p.5). “The direct care role is fundamental to registered nursing, and all other roles within the profession ultimately exist to maintain and support direct nursing care” (SRNA, 2013, p.7).

Education

The baccalaureate degree in nursing is the required level of education for those entering the profession. RNs can choose to pursue additional education at the masters, doctoral and post-doctoral levels. To practice registered nursing in Saskatchewan, registration and licensure with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses’ Association (SRNA) is required. All members must have successfully passed the national registered nurse licensure exam. The Registered Nurse (Nurse Practitioner) {RN(NP)} is an advanced practice category of RN who has further education enabling them to diagnose, treat, prescribe and dispense medications for common medical disorders. In addition to the exam requirements for a RN, the RN(NP) must also successfully pass the national nurse practitioner licensure exam required for this category of licensure.

The baccalaureate program in nursing prepares students for the provision of safe, ethical and competent care. This education gives RNs the breadth and depth of knowledge and skills through courses in nursing and related disciplines, enabling RNs to take on multiple responsibilities and carry out a variety of roles to meet complex client health needs in constantly evolving practice environments. “Registered nurse education prepares registered nurses to collaborate with clients, families and other members of the health-care team. Their leadership skills allow them to take responsibility for promoting health-care team effectiveness” (CNA, 2007, p.19).

Scope of Practice

The Registered Nurses Act, 1988 specifically outlines the scope of practice of the RN. Scope of practice refers to the range of services that RNs are educated and authorized to perform. RNs are accountable to practice registered nursing in accordance with *The Registered Nurses Act, 1988, SRNA Bylaws, SRNA Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses, SRNA policy, practice standards, guidelines and*

other relevant legislation. RNs also have ethical commitments and are required to practice according to the ethical values outlined in the CNA *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*.

Registered Nurse Practice

RNs perform comprehensive assessments for all types of client needs and provide nursing care for stable to complex clients of all ages throughout the lifespan and in all settings. “The registered nurse in collaboration with the client, performs an assessment of physical, emotional, spiritual, cognitive, developmental, environmental, social and learning needs, including the client’s beliefs about health and wellness” (SRNA, 2013, p.12). RNs utilize analytical and decision making skills to determine nursing diagnosis, create plans of care, implement and evaluate care outcomes.

RNs facilitate the delivery of primary health care across the continuum of care, from acute care to community to continuing care settings, by promoting health, preventing disease and injury and restoring health in all settings.

Assignment and Coordination of Client Nursing Care

The key components of *The Registered Nurses Act, 1988*, identifies that RNs are responsible for the assignment and coordination of client nursing care. Therefore, the RN is responsible for appropriate assignment of client care and works collaboratively with team members to determine appropriate assignments. This is achieved through the nursing process, a legislated responsibility of the RN. The RN at the point of care* assesses the client. Through planning, implementing and evaluating client care needs, the RN determines the most appropriate care provider who can safely and competently meet the needs of the client. RNs coordinate nursing care in all health care settings.

Knowledge Navigators

RNs are “knowledge navigators” and direct clients to credible resources, teaching them to interpret and evaluate information and helping them find their way in the health care system (CNA, 2007). RNs enable clients to make decisions about their health and health care, and support and respect their decisions.

Leadership and Professionalism

Leadership is fundamental to registered nursing and is essential in ensuring quality client outcomes. RNs use transformational leadership practices including building relationships and trust, creating an empowering work environment, creating a

**Point of care means where the RN is knowledgeable of the individual client’s needs based on ongoing nursing assessment and is responsible for the overall care for the client.*

culture that supports knowledge development and integration, leading and sustaining change and balancing values and priorities in order to promote healthy outcomes for the RN, the patient/client, the organization and the health care system as a whole (RNAO, 2013). Leadership is integral to every practice setting and is critical to client care, health promotion, policy development and health care reform (Kilty, 2005).

Professionalism requires that RNs in all roles demonstrate the following attributes: knowledge, spirit of inquiry, accountability, autonomy, advocacy, innovation and visionary, collegiality and collaboration, and ethics and values (RNAO, 2007).

Continuing Competence

For each RN continuing competence is an integral component of registered nursing practice. All RNs have a professional responsibility to assess their learning needs on an ongoing basis and take action to ensure they are competent to practice efficiently, effectively and safely (SRNA, 2013). Through continuous learning and the incorporation of evidence-informed practices RNs maintain their competency to practice in an evolving health care system.

Need for Registered Nurses

Research demonstrates the link between RN practice and positive client and system outcomes. Client outcomes have been consistently shown to be positively affected by RN intervention across a variety of health care settings (Doran, 2003; White, Pringle, Doran & McGillis Hall, 2005). Aiken et al. (2014) reported that for each 10% increase in the number of baccalaureate-educated nurses, there was a 7% decrease in the likelihood of mortality. Needleman et al. (2011) reported that staffing of RNs below target levels was associated with increased mortality, reinforcing the need to match RN staffing with clients' needs for nursing care.

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