

ASK A PRACTICE ADVISOR

by Sharon Chow, RN, Director of Nursing Practice

Question: What is the scope of practice of a registered nurse?

Answer: The scope of practice of a registered nurse has been clearly identified in the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Act (1988, Amended 2001). Section 2(k) of the Act has defined the practice of registered nursing as the performance or coordination of health care services including but not limited to:

- (i) observing and assessing the health status of clients and planning, implementing and evaluating nursing care; and*
- (ii) the counselling, teaching, supervision, administration and research that is required to implement or complement health care services; for the purpose of promoting, maintaining, or restoring health, preventing illness and alleviating suffering where the performance or co-ordination of those services requires;*
- (iii) the knowledge, skill or judgment of a person who qualifies for registration pursuant to section 19 or 20;*
- (iv) specialized knowledge of nursing theory other than that mentioned in subclause (iii);*
- (v) skill or judgement acquired through nursing practice other than that mentioned in subclause (iii); or*
- (vi) other knowledge of biological, physical, behavioural, psychological and sociological sciences that is relevant to the knowledge, skill or judgement described in subclause (iii), (iv), or (v).*

The practice of registered nursing is based on the study of anatomy, biology, biochemistry, genetics, microbiology, physiology, chemistry, organic chemistry, pharmacology, physics, sociology, psychology and nursing theory. The knowledge gained through the study of these sciences provides registered nurses with a specialized body of knowledge, skills and judgement (critical thinking) to practice as a registered nurse. This knowledge is put

to use in the practice of any of the four domains of nursing practice: education, research, administration, and clinical practice.

The role of the registered nurse is to implement the nursing process: observe and assess the clients, plan the care, implement care and evaluate the effectiveness of care. Through the role of the registered nurse as the direct care provider, the registered nurse is able to assess the clients needs in order to develop and plan care. The nursing process can not be delegated to another care provider who is not a registered nurse. Registered nurses (Registered psychiatric nurses, as applicable) must be the leader of the team to ensure that care is adequately provided. In situations where there is increased intensity, unpredictable changes in clients and / or unstable patients, the knowledge, skills and judgement of the registered nurse is mandatory for the provision of appropriate and safe nursing care.

Through the clear definition of the scope of the registered nurse, the Act has enabled registered nurses to provide counselling, teaching, supervision, administration and research. Registered nurses in all domains of practice have needed to integrate all the above roles into their respective practice settings. This means that each registered nurse has a responsibility to counsel patients, teach patients and colleagues, supervise members of the health care team, administer according to facility policies and procedures, and have a practice that is focused on evidence and contributes to research in nursing.

The traditional role of the nurse manager or head nurse has been the supervision of the nursing care team on the unit coupled with the administration role. The demand of the management role has required some nurse managers to implement a "charge nurse" role on the unit. The RN charge nurse has been delegated an authority by the manager to ensure that the needs of the clients are met. The charge nurse becomes an extension of the management arm and manages the day to day needs of the unit and clients. The charge nurse role will include ensuring adequate staffing, caring for

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clients, and assignment of staff for the current and potentially oncoming shift.

The scope of the registered nurse has been clearly defined in legislation. With the changes in the health care providers, registered nurses continue to maintain a responsibility for overseeing the nursing care of clients. The registered nurse is not accountable for the care provided by other regulated members of the health care team (other registered nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, physicians, LPNs, etc). Although the RNs are not responsible

or accountable for another provider's practice, the RN needs to know about the care of the clients and the clients' needs to ensure that the RN can coordinate the care appropriately. No changes in employer policies or care delivery models can alleviate the role of the registered nurse according to legislation.

References: Province of Saskatchewan. The Registered Nurses Act, (1988, amended, 2001), Regina