



# ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE

## GUIDELINES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

This document provides information and guidance for nurses, employers, health planners and health policymakers on the concept of advanced nursing practice in the Australian context.

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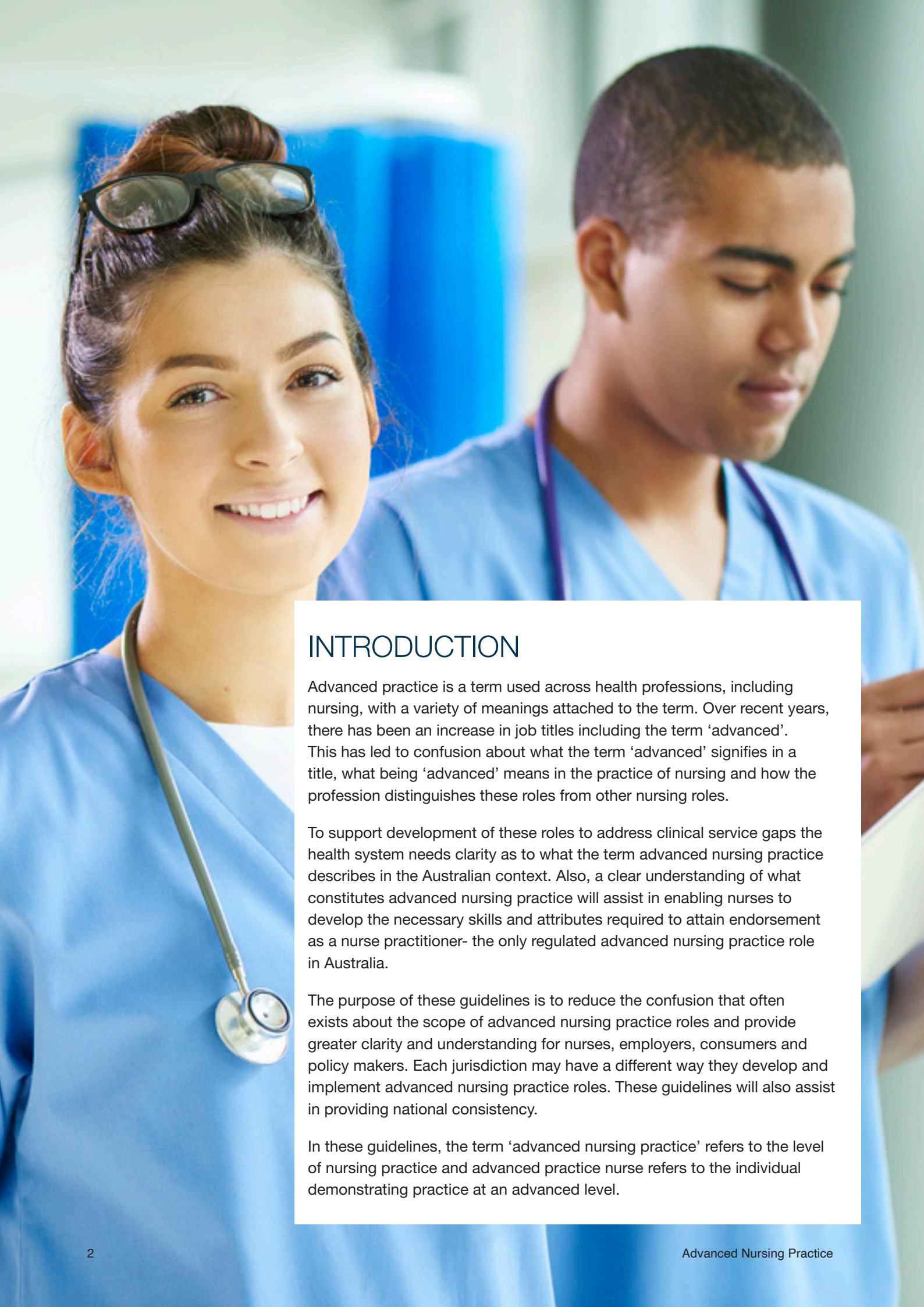
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## INTRODUCTION

Advanced practice is a term used across health professions, including nursing, with a variety of meanings attached to the term. Over recent years, there has been an increase in job titles including the term 'advanced'. This has led to confusion about what the term 'advanced' signifies in a title, what being 'advanced' means in the practice of nursing and how the profession distinguishes these roles from other nursing roles.

To support development of these roles to address clinical service gaps the health system needs clarity as to what the term advanced nursing practice describes in the Australian context. Also, a clear understanding of what constitutes advanced nursing practice will assist in enabling nurses to develop the necessary skills and attributes required to attain endorsement as a nurse practitioner- the only regulated advanced nursing practice role in Australia.

The purpose of these guidelines is to reduce the confusion that often exists about the scope of advanced nursing practice roles and provide greater clarity and understanding for nurses, employers, consumers and policy makers. Each jurisdiction may have a different way they develop and implement advanced nursing practice roles. These guidelines will also assist in providing national consistency.

In these guidelines, the term 'advanced nursing practice' refers to the level of nursing practice and advanced practice nurse refers to the individual demonstrating practice at an advanced level.



## BACKGROUND

To develop perspective on this issue the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer (Australian Government), collaborated with the Australian and New Zealand Council of Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers (ANZCCNMO), to host an Advanced Practice Symposium in March 2017. Invited participants included stakeholders from education, regulation, health policy, professional and industrial organisations; workforce development sectors, nurses practising at and working towards the advanced practice level and employers across both the public and private health sectors.

The symposium sought to identify critical elements of advanced nursing practice in the Australian context. The symposium was informed by a survey of employers designed to capture their perspective, level of understanding and use of advanced practice nursing roles. The program on the day also included a presentation by Professor Glenn Gardner outlining the findings of the SCAN (Scoping Advanced Practice Nursing) Research Program conducted from 2007-2017.<sup>1</sup> Symposium outcomes provided a greater understanding of the current issues and valuable insights beneficial to developing advanced nursing practice roles.

Symposium participants agreed that;

- The current definition of advanced nursing practice in Australia lacks clarity
- Advanced Practice is a level of practice and not necessarily a role or specific position
- It is necessary to identify and articulate the educational requirements underpinning advanced nursing practice
- It is important to have a nationally consistent approach to advanced nursing practice.

Symposium participants agreed a national advanced nursing practice framework would assist in addressing specific issues raised in relation to advanced nursing practice by providing;

- An overarching definition of advanced nursing practice which is unambiguous, accepted and supported by the profession. Such a definition would enable consistency in the language used in relation to advanced nursing practice.
- Clarity of the educational requirements the profession believes should underpin advanced nursing practice. This would support consistency across the profession, education providers and the broader health system.
- A clear description of the characteristics of advanced nursing practice, including the similarities and differences between the advanced practice and nurse practitioner roles and the articulation between these levels of practice.
- A description of the difference between advanced nursing practice and the full extent of the RN scope of practice and articulation between these levels of practice.
- Recognition that specialisation and or the acquisition of particular clinical skills or tasks alone does not constitute advanced nursing practice.

The symposium agreed the ANZCCNMO and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) were key stakeholders to drive this work. Acknowledging each jurisdiction may have a different way they operationally apply advanced nursing practice roles guidelines rather than a framework are the outcomes of this further work.

# PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to;

- Provide clarity and understanding about the scope of advanced practice nursing for the nursing profession, consumers, health policymakers and the broader health system in Australia.
- Outline the core characteristics of advanced nursing practice.
- Provide guidance for policymakers, education providers and health services in order to;
  - Support workforce planning and future role development
  - Promote consistency and standardisation across organisations
  - Improve workforce mobility and flexibility
  - Inform educational preparation
  - Guide the clinical and professional development of nurses moving along the practice continuum toward advanced nursing practice

These guidelines draw upon

- research in the Australian context by Professors Gardner and Duffield and colleagues<sup>1</sup>,
- work undertaken by the Department of Health (England) - CNO Directorate, to produce Advanced Level Nursing: A Position Statement<sup>2</sup>,
- the Multi-professional framework for advanced practice in England published by Health Education England (HEE)<sup>3</sup> and
- the NHS Education for Scotland Advanced Practice Toolkit<sup>4</sup>.

## Principles

These guidelines

- Relate to clinical practice and do not outline expectations or indicators in other areas of nursing practice such as management, education or research.
- Build upon the NMBA Registered Nurse Standards for Practice<sup>5</sup> to provide indicators of practice at the advanced practice level.

- Do not seek to identify specific roles, position titles or technical tasks,
- Accept that nurses working at an advanced level demonstrate leadership in clinical practice, are autonomous in the care they provide and practice across professional, organisational and system boundaries.
- Accept that practice at an advanced level is patient centered, is supported by knowledge and experience and is informed by complex clinical reasoning, critical thought and high-level decision making across a diverse range of environments beyond that expected of the general registered nurse (RN).

## Definitions

The following definitions from the NMBA<sup>6</sup> have been used to guide this document.

**Advanced practice:** nurses practising at an advanced practice level incorporate professional leadership, education, research and support of systems into their practice. Their practice includes relevant expertise, critical thinking, complex decision-making, autonomous practice and is effective and safe. They work within a generalist or specialist context and they are responsible and accountable in managing people who have complex healthcare requirements.

Advanced practice in nursing is demonstrated by a level of practice not by a job title or level of remuneration.

Advanced practice for the purpose of the nurse practitioner endorsement requires 5,000 hours clinically-based advanced practice in the past six years.

**Nurse Practitioner:** A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse endorsed as a nurse practitioner by the NMBA. The nurse practitioner practices at an advanced level, meets and complies with the *Nurse practitioner standards for practice*, has direct clinical contact and practices within their scope under the legislatively protected title 'nurse practitioner' under the National Law.



## Characteristics of advanced practice

Advanced practice is a 'level' of practice rather than a particular role or specialist area.

Nurses working at an advanced level will have achieved this during extensive, relevant clinical practice experience and following completion of appropriate post graduate education.

The acquisition of technical skills alone does not constitute advanced practice.

Practice at an advanced level in the Australian context is consistent with the domains defined by the Strong Model of Advanced Practice (figure 3).<sup>7</sup> A level of practice across all five domains (clinical care, support of systems, education, research and professional leadership) and associated elements needs to be demonstrated within the nurse's current role to meet the description of advanced practice.<sup>8</sup>

## Advanced, generalist and specialist practice

Development towards advanced practice is likely to differ for individual nurses. Some may choose to incorporate a path toward specialisation – developing high-level skills and decision-making across a particular population or clinical context. Others will develop a portfolio that reflects high-level assessment, decision making and autonomous practice across a more generalist area of practice.<sup>9</sup> Progression will depend on the *quality and complexity of developmental experiences*, rather than the length of time spent in an area of service.

The difference that helps define roles incorporating advanced practice from other nursing roles, including specialist and generalist is the degree to which critical thinking, clinical reasoning, knowledge, skill level, autonomy and accountability increases as a nurse moves along the continuum from beginning practitioner toward advanced practice<sup>10</sup>. The breadth and depth of practice increases and develops through extensive clinical practice experience and completion of additional post-graduate education.

While all RNs are expected to demonstrate a level of autonomous practice, critical thinking and decision making and problem-solving skills, nurses working at an advanced practice level demonstrate these at a level that is beyond that of the RN workforce.

## Generalist practice

Generalist practice encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of activities. It is directed towards a diversity of people with different health needs, takes place in a wide range of health care settings, and it is reflective of a broad range of knowledge and skills. Generalist practice may occur at any point on a continuum from novice to advanced. (Figure 1).<sup>11</sup>

demonstrate in-depth knowledge, skills and expertise in their area of specialised nursing practice.<sup>12</sup> Expertise in a particular specialty may be developed by undertaking formal education, exposure to relevant clinical experience in the practice area and continuing professional development.<sup>13</sup> There are many nurse specialist roles at the advanced practice level, however, specialisation alone does not characterise an advanced level of practice.

## Specialist practice

The term 'specialist' defines roles focused within a specific context, for example, a particular population or skill set. Specialist practice follows and builds on a base of generalist preparation. Nurse specialists

Specialist practice may also occur at any point on a continuum from beginning to advanced and is on one pole of the 'specialist-generalist' continuum, rather than on the developmental continuum from 'novice' to 'advanced.' (Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

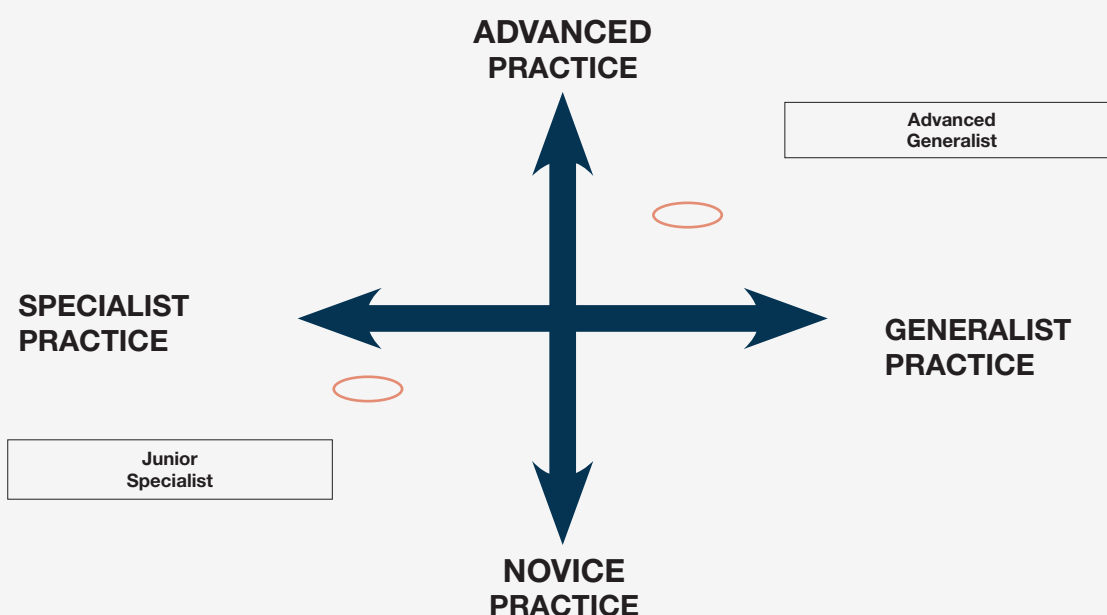


Figure 1: The 'Specialist-generalist' continuum and the developmental continuum from 'novice' to 'expert'.



## The nurse practitioner role and advanced practice

The only regulated advanced practice role in Australia is the role of a nurse practitioner (NP). NPs are advanced practice nurses whose registration is endorsed by the NMBA to enable practise within their scope using the title, which is protected by Law.

The Nurse practitioner standards for practice<sup>15</sup> build on and expand upon those required of a RN. The requirements for endorsement as a NP include formal education through a Masters degree together with demonstrable advanced practice within the RN scope of practice. NPs have a clinical focus and are capable in research, education and leadership as applied to clinical care (figure 2).

### NURSE PRACTITIONERS STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

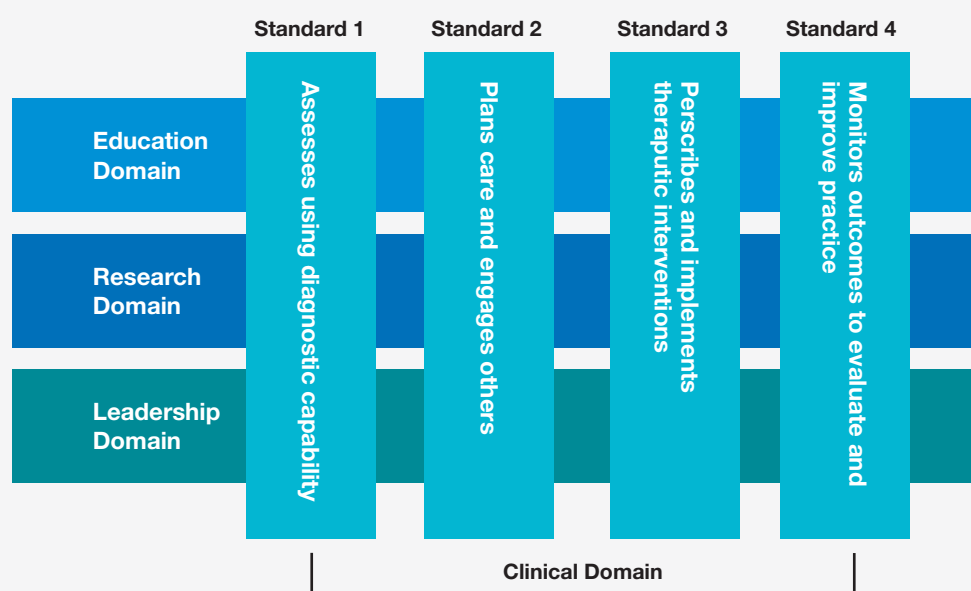


Figure 2: Representation of how the education, research and leadership domains are couched within the clinically focused standards.<sup>15</sup>



## Technical skill development and task acquisition

The flexibility of nursing's scope of practice is central to the profession's ability to respond to the changing health needs of both communities and the service delivery landscape. There are many technical skills nurses learn and perform competently; these skills are incorporated into scope of practice in addition to those present on entry to practice. For example, what were once considered to be extended role activities, such as intravenous drug administration, are now expected of all RNs following relevant educational preparation.

The acquisition of such tasks by nurses often occurs to improve care continuity, reduce fragmentation and improve access to timely health care. However, while these tasks may become components of a nurse's scope of practice, alone, they do not constitute practice at an advanced level.

## Academic preparation for advanced nursing practice

The minimum educational preparation for advanced nursing practice is a relevant post graduate qualification in nursing. However, advanced practice is not demonstrated by completing postgraduate study alone and arises from a combination of graduate education and clinical experience that results in the development of the skills and attributes required to practice at an advanced level.

## Advanced nursing practice domains

The results of contemporary research (the SCan Project) undertaken between 2007 and 2017 by Professors Gardner and Duffield<sup>16</sup> has identified, practice at an advanced level in the Australian context is consistent with the domains defined by the Strong Model of Advanced Practice (figure 3).<sup>17</sup> A level of practice across all five domains needs to be demonstrated within the nurse's current role to meet the description of advanced practice.<sup>18</sup> Outcomes of this body of work include tools for nurses to utilise in the self-assessment of their practice to indicate the extent to which he or she undertakes practice activities in each of the five domains.<sup>19,20</sup>

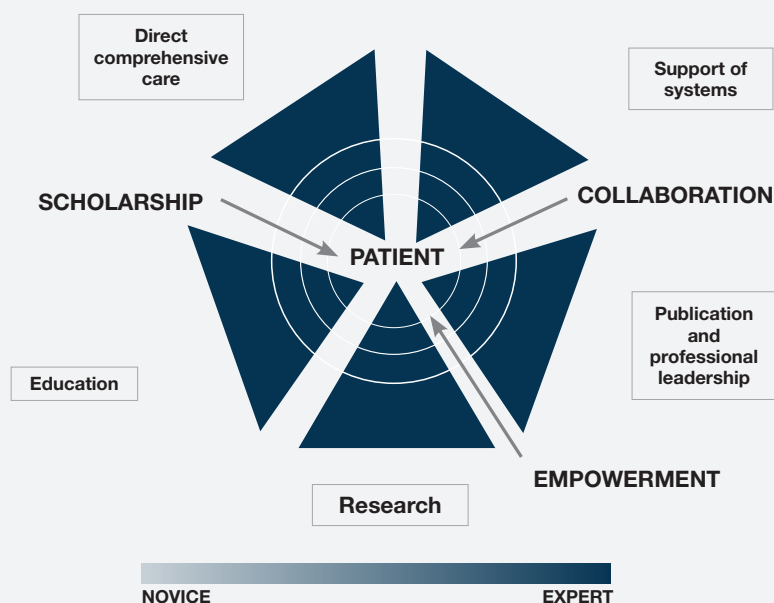


Figure 3: The Strong Model of Advanced Practice<sup>17</sup>



# OUTLINE OF PRACTICE ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE

This section provides an outline of observable practice activities associated with advanced nursing practice across the five domains. Resources from which these examples are drawn include:

- Multi-professional framework for advanced clinical practice in England<sup>21</sup>
- Royal College of Nursing. Advanced level nursing practice competencies<sup>22</sup>
- Department of Health. Advanced Level Nursing: A Position Statement<sup>23</sup>
- The Australian Nursing Workforce Toolkit<sup>24</sup>
- The Strong Model of Advanced Practice<sup>25</sup>

1. Clinical Care	
Activities carried out on behalf of patients focusing on specific needs including physical care, procedures, health assessments, interpretation of data and care planning and coordination.	
Activities	
1.1	Demonstrates autonomous and self-directed practice and the ability to define the boundaries of their scope of practice
1.2	Conducts and documents an in-depth patient history and complete physical examination using a variety of techniques to collect clinical data, some of which may not be routinely used by nurses including requesting, initiating and interpreting diagnostic investigations
1.3	Demonstrates high-level knowledge, critical thinking and complex decision-making skills to plan, initiate and evaluate therapeutic interventions
1.4	Assesses psychosocial, cultural and religious factors affecting patient needs, treatment plans and health outcomes
1.5	Interprets assessment data including results of diagnostic tests and procedures to manage episodes of care in partnership with other health professionals
1.6	Performs specific care and procedures which may not necessarily routinely be provided by the majority of registered nurses in the area of practice
1.7	Uses a range of modalities to support and deliver evidence-based care and are proactive in health promotion and prevention, identifying the need for early intervention, disease management, treatment and care
1.8	Serves as a consultant in improving patient care and nursing practice based on expertise in the area of practice
1.9	Facilitates efficient movement of the patient through the healthcare system, demonstrating effective use of resources and the ability to delegate and refer in order to optimise health outcomes

## 2. Support of systems

Activities that contribute to the optimal performance of health systems including advocacy and mentorship, developing and implementing innovative models of care and improving access to high quality health care and health outcomes.

### Activities

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 2.1 | Proactively identifies the need for and develops strategies to monitor and improve the quality of care at service, organisational and system levels  |
| 2.2 | Identifies the need for change and proactively develops and implements innovation and service redesign initiatives to improve the patient experience and better meet the needs of the health service |
| 2.3 | Demonstrates leadership in strategic planning for the service, department or hospital  |
| 2.4 | Actively participate in assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of quality improvement programs in collaboration with nursing leadership  |
| 2.5 | Provides leadership in clinical governance by contributing to the development, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based standards of practice, policies and procedures                        |
| 2.6 | Manages complex projects or leads projects relating to significant practice change within the service or organisation  |
| 2.7 | Serves as a coach and mentor   |
| 2.8 | Develops and undertakes quality activities to advocate for and demonstrate the contribution of advanced nursing practice roles to the healthcare team and the health system more broadly             |
| 2.9 | Practices across professional, organisational and health system boundaries to proactively develop relationships to influence and improve service delivery and health outcomes                        |

### 3. Education

Activities that contribute to improving health literacy and to supporting self-management of illness. Activities also develop and educate self and others across the health care community.

#### Activities

- 3.1 Works in collaboration with team members to identify learning needs
- 3.2 Plans, delivers and evaluates interventions to meet the learning needs of patients, self, colleagues (both inter and intraprofessionally)
- 3.2 Advocates for and contributes to a culture of continuous professional development and evidence-based practice
- 3.4 Identifies learning needs of various populations and contributes to the development of education programs/resources
- 3.5 Demonstrates active involvement in the development of educational activities at a regional or broader level
- 3.6 Participates in the delivery of postgraduate education programs
- 3.7 Demonstrates reflective practice and develops this practice in others

### 4. Research

Activities that support a culture of inquiry and innovative problem solving to improve health outcomes and health care delivery systems. This includes conducting clinical research, and translating evidence into clinical practice and policy development.

#### Activities

- 4.1 Initiate, conduct or participate in clinical research – undertake the role of principal researcher or work in collaboration with others to conduct research at an institutional or service level to address identified gaps in service delivery
- 4.2 Leads investigations to monitor and improve the quality of patient care practices
- 4.3 Identifies funding sources for the development and implementation of clinical projects/ programs to enhance quality, productivity and value-based care
- 4.4 Demonstrates the ability to appraise and synthesise research and translate relevant outcomes to improve practice
- 4.5 Identify clinical data necessary for inclusion in information systems for nursing research and quality assurance projects
- 4.6 Collaborate with information specialists in the design of data systems for research and quality assurance projects in nursing



## 5. Professional leadership

Activities that promote sharing and dissemination of knowledge, promote the profession and disseminate nursing knowledge. Demonstrate leadership in the role of consultant within and external to the profession and across health care settings.

### Activities

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 5.1 | Demonstrates high-level communication skills in disseminating nursing knowledge through presentations or publication at local, regional, national or international levels |
| 5.2 | Serves as a resource or committee member in a professional organisation   |
| 5.3 | Provides consultancy services inter and intraprofessionally, to lay communities and beyond the boundaries of their own service  |
| 5.4 | Represents nursing in institutional/community forums on the healthcare needs of communities   |
| 5.5 | Represents a professional nursing image at institutional and community forums   |
| 5.6 | Collaborates with other healthcare professionals to provide leadership in shaping public policy on healthcare   |
| 5.7 | Demonstrates and promotes the contribution of advanced nursing practice to the broader health system  |
| 5.8 | Demonstrates professional judgement and leadership in managing clinical care in complex clinical environments or across multiple service or patient populations           |

## PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE

The implementation of advanced nursing practice roles presents a significant opportunity to enhance clinical service delivery. True integration of these roles requires a strategic approach including ensuring both organisational and workforce readiness.

**Implement advanced nursing practice roles to support patient centred care and optimal delivery of services.**

There are various drivers for the introduction of advanced nursing practice roles. In order to enhance the sustainability and measurable impact of these roles, their implementation must be guided by service need. Roles implemented outside organisational strategy or developed only to satisfy individual career progression are often not well integrated into frameworks, resulting in isolation and a reduced likelihood of sustainability. There is growing recognition that successful introduction of this type of role also requires careful planning and attention to the provision of organisational support.<sup>26</sup>

**Define a clear purpose and objectives for advanced nursing practice roles.**

Advanced nursing practice roles often operate across the boundaries of different clinical settings and may also traverse professional boundaries within multi-disciplinary teams. Planning and implementation strategies need to consider how roles are integrated into existing services and articulate with other professional roles. Planning should, therefore, be inclusive of the wider team to facilitate understanding of the value of the role and ensure its purpose and objectives are well defined.

**Implement outcome measures and evaluation**

Measuring the impact of implementing advanced nursing practice roles using robust evaluation methods is essential to highlight the benefits, including how roles address gaps in service delivery, deliver high-value care and contribute to quality improvement.

There are specific questions employers need to consider when implementing advanced nursing practice roles to ensure clarity and appropriate governance is in place:

- What objectives or outcomes are expected from the advanced nursing practice role?
- When will these outcomes be achieved and measured pre and post implementation?
- What risks and unintended consequences might there be to the introduction of this role and how may they be mitigated?
- What resources and support are required for role development and succession planning?
- Is workforce optimised to ensure clinical and financial benefits are maximised?
- How will on-going competence and capability be reviewed and enabled?
- What reporting and line management structure will be in place?
- What processes will identify gaps in performance or shortfalls in implementation and how will these be addressed?

### **Articulate function, scope and parameters of advanced nursing practice roles**

Understanding advanced nursing practice roles relative to the broader team requires an appreciation of the roles of all team members. Inter and intraprofessional engagement and collaboration in the implementation and integration of new roles is essential, particularly when there is a role for other team members in the supervision of clinical practice and or skill development. Scope of practice and any requirements for knowledge and skill development should be clearly articulated. Team members also need to understand their role and level of accountability in assisting in meeting these requirements. To achieve these objectives, there needs to be clarity and understanding as well as a supportive culture of collaboration.

### **Ensure organisational support for advanced nursing practice roles**

Support for advanced nursing practice roles needs to exist through governance and reporting structures at both the local and organisational level. This includes the need to ensure arrangements for appropriately supervised skill acquisition and for assessment of competence where required.

### **Plan for sustainability of advanced nursing practice roles**

The availability of workforce to develop, expand and sustain additional service provision initiatives utilising advanced nursing practice roles requires organisations to support nurses to develop toward advanced practice. This provides potential to improve workforce flexibility and assists in generating a sustainable supply of advanced practice nurses who can work across boundaries.



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