

Guidelines

CARNA College & Association of
Registered Nurses of Alberta

Requisite Skills and Abilities for Becoming a Registered Nurse in Alberta

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Approved by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) Provincial Council, May 2011.

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The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) is the legislated regulatory college and professional association in which all registered nurses in the province are members. The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) (2000) and the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* (2005) set out the responsibilities of CARNA. Under this legislation CARNA is responsible for governing its regulated members in a manner that protects the public and serves the public interest. Meeting this expectation requires that registered nurses be educated so that they are able to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care.

Purpose

This document is designed to inform potential nursing students, admission officers, nursing faculties, disability service providers and equity officers, and the public of the general demands and performance expectations of registered nurses upon initial entry to practice in Alberta. Nursing education prepares them with the foundation necessary to be competent within the health care team and the health care system. At the completion of their nursing education program all student nurses must demonstrate the capacity to meet CARNA's *Entry-to-Practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession* and be able to practise within the context of the CARNA's *Nursing Practice Standards*.

Nursing students need certain basic skills and abilities to attain the entry-to-practice competencies for registered nurses in Alberta. These basic skills and abilities are called requisite skills and abilities (RSAs) for registered nurses in Alberta and all are required for progression through a nursing education program and for initial entry to practice as a registered nurse.

Prospective nursing students may find the following information on requisite skills and abilities particularly useful in identifying their fit with the requirements of becoming a registered nurse and/or identifying their potential need for accommodation¹ in becoming a member of the nursing profession. The Alberta Human Rights Commission interpretive document *Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions* stipulates that accommodation does not require post-secondary institutions to lower the academic or non-academic standards to accommodate students with disabilities nor does it relieve students of the responsibility to develop the essential

¹ Accommodation is the process of making alterations (to the point of undue hardship) to the delivery of services so that those services become accessible to more people, including people with disabilities. (Alberta Human Rights Commission)

skills and competencies expected of all students (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2010).

This requisite skills and abilities document could also serve as a valuable resource for high school counsellors in facilitating discussions on nursing as a career choice. If a prospective or current student recognizes the need for accommodation in relation to the RSAs to progress through a nursing education program, a request for accommodation should be made to the educational institution at the earliest opportunity.

Entry-Level Registered Nurse

The focus and core of all registered nursing practice is the provision of direct care to clients. The registered nurse at the point of initial entry to practice must practise safely, competently and ethically in situations of health and illness with people of all ages, genders and cultures across a variety of settings. Clients of nursing care may be individuals, families, groups, communities or populations.

Entry-level registered nurses plan, provide, evaluate and document individualized nursing care for people of all ages and genders, in situations related to: health promotion, disease prevention, and population health; altered health status, including acute and chronic health conditions and rehabilitative care; and hospice, palliative and end-of-life care. Entry-level registered nurses enter their careers with competencies that are transferable across diverse practice settings. The practice environment of entry-level RNs can be any setting or circumstance that includes the site where nursing care is provided or programs designed to meet clients' health-care needs, ranging from large urban to remote rural settings (e.g., hospitals, communities, homes, clinics, schools, residential facilities).

Approved nursing education programs are required to provide a breadth of nursing knowledge and varied practice learning opportunities. Upon graduation all new RNs in Alberta must have the capacity to meet CARNA's entry-to-practice competencies for registered nurses and to be able to practise within the context of CARNA's *Nursing Practice Standards and the Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics*. These entry-to-practice competencies, which are broad based, reflect the minimum level of practice expected of registered nurses in order to provide the public with safe, competent and ethical nursing care. The competencies also aim to ensure that entry-level registered nurses are able to function in today's realities and are well equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt to changes in health care and nursing.

Nursing education programs that lead to initial entry to practice as a registered nurse prepares graduates with a breadth and depth of specialized knowledge and the foundation necessary to comprehensively apply that knowledge to assist clients in meeting their health needs regardless of complexity and the situation in which they occur. The CARNA document, *Entry-to-Practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession*, describes the competencies expected of the new graduate from an approved nursing education program. The *Entry-to-Practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession* are used in nursing education program approval and are a fundamental component of the Nursing Education Program Approval Board (NEPAB) nursing education standards. The competencies serve as a guide for curriculum development and also for public and employer awareness of the practice expectations of entry-level registered nurses.

Requisite Skills and Abilities

Requisite skills and abilities (RSAs) are the basic skills and abilities required by nursing students for progression through a nursing education program and for initial entry-to-practice as a registered nurse. CARNA considers RSAs fundamental to the provision of safe, competent and ethical nursing care in the best interest of the public.

There are seven categories of requisite skills and abilities.

1. Cognitive
2. Behavioural
3. Communication
4. Interpersonal
5. Physical
6. Sensory perceptual
7. Environmental

The examples following each requisite skill and ability are included to provide a snapshot of the nature and kind of activities involved in typical entry-level registered nurse practice. The examples are intended to mean “including, but not limited to” the particular examples provided.

Cognitive

1. Remember and recall information over a brief period of time.
2. Remember and recall information over an extended period of time.
3. Problem-solve to develop professional judgment.
4. Reason to develop professional judgment.
5. Exercise critical inquiry skills² to develop professional judgment.
6. Apply mathematical skills and abilities in order to:
 - add, subtract, multiply and divide
 - calculate ratios, percentages and apply algebraic equations

Examples

Recalls clinical skills or multiple signs and symptoms and diagnoses from previous clients; makes sense of complex knowledge; uses knowledge and theory appropriately; uses past experience to inform current decision making; perceives when situations require further inquiry; calculates and verifies medication dosages; recalls written, oral or recorded information provided by either colleagues or clients.

Behavioural

1. Manage own behaviour well enough to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care.
2. Engage with self and others to create a safe environment.
3. Respond appropriately in situations that are stressful or that involve conflict.
4. React appropriately to giving and receiving physical touch and working in close proximity with a full range of clients.
5. Fulfill responsibility as part of a team.
6. Manage time appropriately.

² This term expands the meaning of critical thinking to encompass critical reflection on actions. Critical inquiry means a process of purposive thinking and reflective reasoning where practitioners examine ideas, assumptions, principles, conclusions, beliefs and actions in the context of nursing practice.

Examples

Remains calm in stressful situations; reacts quickly and effectively to unexpected or unusual situations; uses interpersonal and negotiation skills to settle disputes and responds appropriately to conflict; sets priorities in the face of multiple demands; provides nursing care in a safe, competent, ethical and timely manner.

Communication

1. Speak and understand spoken English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings: including complex medical and technical terminology.
2. Read, write and understand written English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings.
3. Recognize own non-verbal signals and interpret and validate those received from others while considering individual and cultural differences in expression and associated meaning.

Examples

Recognizes their own non-verbal behaviour; demonstrates awareness that each individual's behaviour has different meanings; listens appropriately to clients; elicits and attends to information from clients while taking a health history; communicates clearly and accurately with other health care team members about clients in a timely manner. Reads and understands client record.

Interpersonal

1. Develop professional relationships and rapport with individuals and groups for the purpose of education, support and counseling.
2. Recognize the needs of clients and colleagues.
3. Maintain interpersonal boundaries.

Examples

Supports a client during a painful procedure; identifies that others have needs and perspectives that might be different from the student; maintains professional boundaries with clients; educates and supports clients to make healthy choices; recognizes and validates client perspectives and feelings.

Physical

Ability to perform each of the following requisites well enough to provide client care and participate in educational activities:

1. stand and maintain balance
2. manual dexterity
3. move within limited spaces
4. push and pull
5. perform repetitive movements
6. perform complex sequences of hand eye coordination
7. bend
8. reach
9. lift
10. walk
11. climb
12. carry objects

Examples

Changes a sterile dressing on a wound; assists a person to get out of bed and walk; climb stairs carrying supplies up to 8 kg for a home visit; handles items that weigh up to 20 kg; help lift, turn and/or transfer clients; prepares and administers intramuscular injections; removes wound sutures.

Sensory Perceptual

Ability to perceive with each of the following senses well enough to provide care and participate in educational activities:

1. sight
2. hearing
3. touch
4. smell

Examples

Accurately assesses blood pressure and feel a client's pulse; accurately assess heart and breath sounds; reads the small print on medication packages and bottles; reads numbers and lines of demarcation on a syringe; hears alarm bells and verbal communication or sounds of other clients when they are not visible or in the immediate area where the care is being provided; assesses client colour and skin temperature; reads text, numbers and diagrams on computer screens and other electronic devices; able to detect foul odors such as strong foul smelling urine.

Environmental

Ability to function in the presence of each of the following commonly encountered and unavoidable environmental factors:

1. noxious smells
2. disease agents
3. distractions
4. noise
5. chemicals
6. unpredictable behaviour of others

Examples

Recognizes dangers in the client environment; potential exposure to infectious diseases, chemicals and allergens; tolerate disposing of body waste (urine, feces, vomit); and tolerate unpleasant and foul odors.

Conclusion

The requisite skills and abilities outlined in this document represent those that are required for an individual to meet the entry-to-practice competencies for registered nurses. For more information on CARNA's document entitled *Entry-to-practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession* go to www.nurses.ab.ca.

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