



Interpretive Guidelines

The following appendix was developed as an application tool to assist with interpreting the intent of the Nursing Qualification Standards. The examples and illustrations contained in this appendix are not meant to be inclusive of every performance which might successfully demonstrate the accomplishment of a given performance element. The development of the interpretive guidelines grew out of the recognition that there was variance in the strictness of interpretation and application of the standards across facilities and a desire to reduce the variance.

Time reference for evaluation/ rating period.

It is important to note that consistency should also be established in setting time references for the accomplishment of performance standards. Evaluations from the past 1-2 years may be combined with the current evaluation

to determine that the performance criteria have been met. It is not always reasonable to expect that all the performance elements required can be accomplished in the same rating period.

Application of waiver of experience and/or education provisions:

The Nurse Professional Standards Boards may recommend a waiver of experience and/or the degree requirements for individuals whose professional accomplishments, performance, and qualifications warrant such consideration based on demonstrated ability to meet the requirements for promotion to the next higher grade or advancement to a higher level within the grade. [MP5, Part II, Chapter 5(5.07)(6)]

*(If the registered nurse has accomplished the performance elements for promotion to the next grade, the lack of the required degree should not be an impediment to promotion.)

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse 1, Level 1

General: Delivers fundamental, knowledge-based care to assigned clients while developing technical competencies.

Practice: Uses the nursing process (assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, implementation, and evaluation).

Accurately documents care of clients

The individual is able to deliver safe, basic care to assigned clients while developing technical competencies. Documents care according to facility policy.

Quality of Care: Describes the quality improvement process, roles and responsibilities, and identifies quality improvement activities on the unit.

Familiar with unit monitors and results. Makes change in own practice to comply with quality improvement plan for unit.

Performance: Participates in appraisal of own performance.

Submits self-assessment to supervisor. Receptive to constructive evaluations and accepts assistance in identifying learning needs.

Education/Career Development: Seeks opportunities to acquire and develop basic skills.

Participates in orientation, unit-based inservices and continuing education activities.

Collegiality: Establishes professional relationships with peers. Seeks out colleagues for mutual information exchange.

Communicates effectively with co-workers. Recognizes and utilizes the expertise of others to gain skills and knowledge.

Ethics: Safeguards client privacy and confidentiality. Provides care in a non-judgmental, non-discriminatory manner, respecting the values and beliefs of members of all cultures.

Maintains confidentiality of patient information. Treats all clients with respect.

Collaboration: Communicates with clients and other healthcare providers regarding client care.

Communicates plan of care to clients and communicates client progress/changes in status to other providers.

Research: Assists in identifying problem areas in nursing practice.

Identifies interventions which are ineffective and not research based.

Resource Utilization: Provides care in a safe and cost-effective manner.

Provides safe care and conserves resources effectively.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse 1, Level 2

General: Demonstrates integration of biopsychosocial concepts, cognitive skills, and technically competent practice in providing care to clients with basic or complex needs.

Practice: Demonstrates competency using the nursing process in providing care for clients. Directs others who provide care.

The individual is able to independently deliver technically competent care to clients with basic or complex needs. Makes assignments and directs activities of supportive personnel (i.e., NA's, students, and other team members). (Does not require charge nurse responsibilities)

Quality of Care: Uses quality improvement findings to guide and direct own practice.

Participates in unit quality improvement activities and uses results to modify own practice.

Performance: Incorporates feedback regarding performance and interpersonal skills to enhance professional development. Participates in the performance evaluations of others.

Incorporates feedback into goals for improvement and takes action to accomplish. Provides feedback to nurse manager/supervisor on performance of others, participates in peer reviews as requested.

Education/Career Development: Seeks knowledge and skills appropriate to the practice setting to improve performance.

Develops improved competency in procedures and skills applicable to area of assignment through practice, inservices or continuing education.

Collegiality: Shares knowledge and skills with colleagues/others.

Attends and participates in staff meetings, unit inservices. Assists supportive personnel and/or students in learning basic procedures.

Ethics: Assumes responsibility and accountability for individual nursing judgments and actions. Acts as a client advocate.

Recognizes ethical issues in provision of care. Takes responsibility for own practice. Identifies resources for patient/family rights.

Collaboration: Participates effectively on teams to plan and manage client care.

Participates in and contributes to team conferences, discharge planning and staff meetings; consults with other team members in planning and providing care.

Research: Demonstrates awareness of research application to practice.

Identifies the application of research-based literature to nursing interventions.

Resource Utilization: Plans and organizes care based on client needs and provider competencies to assure safe, efficient and cost-effective care.

Effectively directs flow of patient care and nursing resources; sets patient care priorities that ensure patient safety and effective care delivery.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse 1, Level 3

General: Demonstrates proficiency in practice based on conscious, deliberate planning. Self directed in goal setting for managing complex client situations.

Practice: Demonstrates proficiency using the nursing process in providing care for clients with complex nursing care needs. Guides and directs others who provide care.

The individual is able to manage and deliver care for complex client situations. May function in a team leader or charge nurse role on a unit, or function independently in a clinical, education, quality management, research or other role or practice area.

Quality of Care: Participates in established quality improvement studies and/or activities.

Participates in data collection, analysis and recommendations for change for established monitors. Incorporates practice change recommendations into practice.

Performance: Conducts self-assessment of performance and identifies own learning needs. Assesses the performance of others.

Identifies own deficits in skills and knowledge and takes action to correct. Is able to objectively evaluate the clinical performance of other personnel and give feedback when requested. (The use of the word evaluate does not imply a supervisory function requirement.)

Education/Career Development: Implements an ongoing educational plan to support own professional development.

Attends inservices/continuing education programs to improve or enhance skills/knowledge; reads current literature to improve knowledge.

Collegiality: Provides feedback regarding the practice of others to improve client care.

Provides feedback directly to provider or to supervisor regarding practice of co-workers.

Ethics: Identifies ethical issues in practice and takes appropriate action.

Recognizes ethical problems and applies institutional policy in providing patient care. Consults resources when appropriate to preserve patient/family rights.

Collaboration: Refers to, consults with, and makes provision for continuity of care with other health care providers.

Consults with other health care providers to formulate a collaborative plan of care. Demonstrates appropriate interpersonal skills with other health care providers.

Research: Uses a body of research to validate and/or change own professional practice.

Reads and evaluates research based literature related to practice, problems or issues and incorporates that knowledge into critical thinking about the practice, problem or issue. Validates or changes personal professional practice when appropriate.

Resource Utilization: Delegates care in a safe, efficient, and cost effective manner. Assists clients in identifying and securing appropriate services.

Makes assignments and/or performs in a manner, which reflects optimum use of staff available and priority care needs. Assesses situations to determine needs and makes appropriate arrangements or referrals to provide for goal attainment.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse II

General: Demonstrates leadership in delivering and improving holistic care through collaborative strategies with others.

Practice: Applies the nursing process to systems or processes at the unit/team/work group level to improve care. Demonstrates leadership by involving others in improving care.

Demonstrates ability to function effectively in charge nurse, team leader or other leadership roles requiring application of problem solving skills at the unit or team level, and use team approaches to identify, analyze and resolve problems.

Quality of Care: Initiates/participates in quality improvement activities that result in improved outcomes.

Demonstrates leadership in unit-level quality improvement activities. Identifies problem areas for monitoring and evaluation, active in analyzing findings and changing practice based on quality improvement findings.

Performance: Evaluates practice of self and others using professional standards, relevant statutes, and regulations. Takes action to improve performance.

Self-directed in evaluating progress toward professional career goals. Evaluates practice of self and colleagues against standards of practice and relevant regulations (i.e., professional nursing organizations, nurse practice acts, JCAHO, OSHA) and takes action to improve compliance.

Education/Career Development: Acquires knowledge and skills to maintain expertise in area of practice. Participates in educational activities to improve clinical knowledge and enhance role performance.

Pursues an educational plan (literature review, continuing education, inservices, certification, formal education) to maintain/improve knowledge in a specialized area of professional practice.

Collegiality: Educates colleagues and/or students and serves as a preceptor and/or mentor.

Shares knowledge with colleagues and/or students either in formal inservices or informally as a resource person or consultant in an area of practice. Serves as a preceptor to new staff and/or mentor to less experienced staff. (A formalized preceptor/mentor program is not required to meet this standard.)

Ethics: Supports and enhances client self-determination. Serves as a resource for clients and staff in addressing ethical issues.

Acts as a patient advocate when client self-determination is in question. Provides accurate information to clients and other staff when ethical issues arise.

Collaboration: Uses group process to identify, analyze, and resolve care problems.

Collaborates with others in the unit/work group and uses group process to identify, analyze and resolve problems affecting care.

Research: Uses a body of research to validate and/or change work group practice.

The individual nurse (or group of nurses, as part of a work group initiative): 1) identifies clinical problems or issues, 2) reads and evaluates research based literature related to the identified practice, problem or issue, 3) incorporates that knowledge into critical thinking about the practice, problem or issue, 4) uses the knowledge to validate or change work group practice when appropriate.

Resource Utilization: Identifies and assesses resource utilization and safety issues, taking appropriate action.

Identifies potential problems involving resources and/or safety and takes action to avert or manage the situation in a manner which meets the needs of clients in a safe/therapeutic manner.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse III

General: Executes position responsibilities that demonstrate leadership, experience, and creative approaches to management of complex client care.

Practice: Provides leadership in the application of the nursing process to client care, organizational processes and/or systems, improving outcomes at the program or service level.

These individuals may function in a variety of roles which impact client care, organizational processes or systems to improve overall outcomes. The effect of the nurse's practice must go beyond an individual unit/team to encompass a program, service, or service line. Roles may include, but are not limited to expert clinician, clinical specialist, nurse practitioner, nurse manager, educator, researcher, QI Coordinator, recruiter or clinical coordinator.

Program: a program is defined as a structured plan, system or curriculum under which action is taken toward a goal. A program's focus may be clinical (patient care), administrative, educational (patient or staff) or research. A program generally identifies a purpose, policy, delegation of authority and procedure. A program's scope must be broad enough to impact more than one individual patient care unit. It may affect several units or a service or a service line or the entire medical center. In order to meet this criterion, outcomes must be presented.

Quality of Care: Initiates interdisciplinary projects to improve organizational performance.

Provides active leadership (may or may not be the designated chair of the group) on interdisciplinary committees, task forces or other

groups which have the objective of improving organizational performance such as Patient Health Education Committees, QI Committees, the development/evaluation of clinical guidelines or customer service initiatives.

Performance: Uses professional standards of care and practice to evaluate programs and/or service activities.

Actively involved in evaluating practice for any program or service based on established professional (e.g. ANA, AORN), community (e.g. Best Practices), or regulatory standards (e.g. JCAHO) and recommending and implementing changes to meet those standards.

Education/Career Development: Implements an educational plan to meet changing program or service needs for self and others. Maintains knowledge of current techniques, trends and professional issues.

Assesses educational needs to implement program or service practice changes, develops and implements an education plan to meet needs for self and other staff in the program or service. The educational plan may involve traditional instructor/student activities, self-learning strategies, and any other learning media (print/video/audio) and must include methods to evaluate effectiveness. Maintains professional knowledge and skills based on currently published or communicated information through reading, workshops, etc.

(Nurse III continued on the next page)

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Collegiality: Coaches colleagues in team building. Makes sustained contributions to health care by sharing expertise within and/or outside the facility.

Actively participates on ad hoc, nursing or medical center/health care system committees. Promotes the group's task accomplishment through interaction and problem solving with other group members. Shares clinical/professional expertise with others within the facility or beyond through consultation, presentations, publication, or participation in professional organizations, etc.

Ethics: Provides leadership in identifying and addressing ethical issues that impact clients and staff, including initiating and participating in ethical consultations.

Analyzes ethical issues and appropriate theoretical principles; ensures application of institutional policy; serves as a resource and advocate for the protection of patient and family rights.

Collaboration: Uses group process to identify, analyze, and resolve care problems.

Collaborates with other health care providers and caregivers and uses group process for decision-making in interdisciplinary problem solving.

Research: Collaborates with others in research activities to improve care.

Collaborates with and assists others within or across work groups to validate and/or improve practice (i.e. solve practice problems/issues) either on the basis of application of current research-based knowledge or the conduct of research. This may include methods to evaluate the outcomes of practice changes (innovations/interventions) and reporting the results as appropriate.

Resource Utilization: Manages program resources (financial, human, material, or informational) to facilitate safe, effective, and efficient care.

Analyzes resources available and identifies risk areas which include budgetary, staffing, supplies and equipment, or availability of data/information. Evaluates options available and selects a course of action which will result in the most favorable client or organizational outcomes.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse IV

General: Executes leadership that is characterized by substantial and continuous responsibility and accountability for population groups or integrated programs that cross service and/or discipline lines and influence organizational mission and health care.

The individual may possess advanced clinical practice credentials and experience and provide primary or highly specialized health care management for large groups of veterans. This responsibility includes developing a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to the patient's total health care, within the context of the organizational mission statement. The Level IV nurse may be a nurse in advanced practice such as a Nurse Practitioner, Clinical Nurse Specialist or Nurse Midwife.

Or the nurse may possess advance managerial credentials and be responsible and accountable for the coordination and evaluation of integrated programs that cross service and/or discipline lines. The individual may be a Chief Nurse at a small facility, an Assistant or Associate Chief Nurse at a large/complex facility or may direct the education, research or quality improvement program for a facility or a service.

Practice: Uses an analytical framework, such as the nursing process, to create an environment that facilitates the delivery of care. Coordinates and evaluates integrated programs or demonstrates clinical excellence in management of population groups.

Uses specialized expertise to assess, design, measure and/or evaluate broad programs or clinical practice. Utilizes current trends and relevant theory to identify and analyze problem

areas in programs or practice. Accepts substantial and continuing responsibility for directing/managing an integrated program or population group.

Quality of Care: Provides leadership in improving and sustaining the quality and effectiveness of care in diverse or complex programs.

Identifies outcomes, which could be improved, initiates/leads quality improvement teams to collect data, analyze results, and design practice changes to improve outcomes and evaluate outcomes.

Performance: Implements standards of professional practice and accrediting bodies, and applicable regulations.

Role models standards of professional practice; evaluates accreditation standards and ensures that clinical practice and program policies/procedures are in compliance.

Education/Career Development: Develops staff for career progression. Forecasts new knowledge needs for changing practice environments/population groups. Plans, implements, and evaluates strategies to meet those needs.

Mentors/precepts staff and/or students for career advancement. Identifies current trends in clinical practice or delivery models/environments and the knowledge needed by staff to remain current. Ensures that the education and training programs to meet the needs are in place and effective.

(Nurse IV continued on the next page)

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Collegiality: Contributes to the professional growth and development of colleagues and other health care providers at the local, regional, state, or national level.

Establishes and/or maintains effective collegial relationships within the service, between services, within administration and with other leaders in the larger health care community. Assumes leadership within the profession through involvement in professional organizations and the academic community.

Ethics: Provides leadership in addressing ethical issues that impact clients and staff in or beyond the organization and the local health care community.

Assumes leadership in applying ethical principles to resolve substantial ethical dilemmas in practice; a strong advocate for protection of patient/family rights both individually and at an organizational level within the facility or at the local/regional/national level.

Collaboration: Demonstrates leadership in developing productive working relationships with groups in other programs, services, academic settings, and community settings.

Facilitates the delivery of patient care in collaboration with health care providers, health care managers and other resources within the community.

Research: Collaborates with staff, other disciplines, faculty, and peers in developing, conducting and evaluating research activities and programs.

Provides leadership in developing and evaluating a program of research/research utilization activities in nursing, and works with other staff, other disciplines, academia, and/or peers to accomplish this. Presents and/or publishes results of activities.

Resource Utilization: Designs, modifies, and implements systems compatible with professional standards and with mission and goals of the organization to improve the cost-effective use of resources.

Manages the resources (financial, human, material, informational) of a complex program or service in a manner which applies professional standards of practice in the most effective, efficient method resulting in favorable outcomes.

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Nurse V

General: Practice of an executive nature, comprises of complex, leadership and administrative components, associated with critical health care issues and activities that influence the organizational mission, health care, and policy.

Assignments at this level require practice of an executive nature, comprised of complex managerial and administrative components, associated with critical health care issues and activities that influence the organizational mission, health care, and policy. There is a substantial sphere of influence across multiple sites or programs, and across the full continuum of care (inpatient, outpatient, extended care). Substantial involvement in multi-site, regional, and/or national professional and health related issues are integral to the assignment.

Practice: Collaborates with health care executives in creating the organizational mission and vision. Directs the integration of nursing or nursing related activities in the mutual development and achievement of organizational goals.

Implements standards of professional practice, as required by accrediting bodies and applicable regulations. Develops policy related to professional practice on community, regional and national levels.

Quality of Care: Improves the quality and effectiveness of the facility's overall health care program by providing leadership, coordinating, and facilitating the evaluation and improvement of a wide range of programs. Excellence is reflected in improved client outcomes and organizational performance.

Evaluates outcomes, benchmarks best

practices, and disseminates innovations throughout the system. Uses internal and external customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction indicators to drive improvement. Identifies key processes and barriers in relation to meeting customer needs and desired results. Develops new practices and procedures that better meet customer needs and expectations.

Performance: Develops policy related to professional practice and relevant statutes and regulations on community, regional, and/or national levels.

Identifies and appropriately handles sensitive and confidential professional practice issues. Demonstrates the eight core competencies of the High Performance Development Model.

Education/Career Development: Mentors others in executive leadership positions. Forecasts knowledge needs for complex multi-system change.

Develops staff for career progression. Forecasts new knowledge needs for changing practice environments/population groups. Plans, implements, and evaluates strategies that ensure opportunities are available for staff to develop these competencies.

Collegiality: Serves as an expert to communicate nursing and health care trends and issues at the local, regional, state, and/or national level.

Demonstrates leadership in developing productive, working relationships with groups in other programs, services, academic settings, and community agencies.

(Nurse V continued on the next page)

Interpretive Guidelines (continued)

Ethics: Advocates for ethical decision-making on behalf of the public and staff. Develops an environment for ethical decision-making at the organizational level.

Provides leadership in addressing ethical issues that impact clients and staff in/or beyond the organization and the local health care community. Communicates and demonstrates through actions high standards of personal integrity.

Collaboration: Collaborates with other executives for strategic planning, decision-making, and problem solving about health care services and organizational priorities.

Collaborates in creating and promoting the organization's vision, mission and values. Directs the integration of nursing and nursing related activities in the mutual development and achievement of organizational goals.

Research: Promotes an environment that supports the conduct and utilization of research in practice and a spirit of inquiry.

Research utilization is demonstrated and promoted in clinical, educational and administrative practice areas.

Resource Utilization: Develops resource utilization strategies to improve organizational performance. Strategies reflect the changing societal and health care environments and the economic climate.

Develops and implements human resource management plans and practices which are consistent with and contribute to the achievement of the facility vision, values and operating performance plan. Designs, modifies, and implements systems to improve the cost-effective use of resources that are compatible with professional standards, and the goals of the organization.