



Nurse Qualification Standard - 1999

A Guide for Registered Nurses

Introduction

Sweeping changes are taking place in every aspect of American health care, and the Department of Veterans Affairs is no exception. The Veterans Health Administration is transforming from a hospital-based system to one that delivers most of its care in outpatient, home and community settings; and that focuses on primary care and care management.

The goal of the Veterans Health Administration is to ensure that its nurses are educationally prepared to provide the highest quality of health care to veterans across the full range of current clinical practice roles and settings, as well as within the many new roles for nurses that are evolving.

Professional nursing staff in VHA provide a broad range of nursing care in the context of disease or injury prevention, health promotion, health restoration and health maintenance. The Nurse Qualification Standards define the performance and education requirements for a registered nurse to be appointed to and promoted in the Veterans Health Administration. The current Standards were last revised

in 1982. In 1992 the VHA nursing community recognized the need for revision to reflect current nursing practice. Concurrently, Public Law 102-585 directed that the standards would be revised to reflect the current five-grade system for nurses. The revised Standards were completed in 1995 using the American Nurses' Association "Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice" which consists of standards of care and standards of professional performance.

Multiple stakeholders have been involved in developing and or implementing the revised Nurse Qualification Standards. They include nurses in education, administration, clinical practice and research, representatives from the five bargaining units, the VISN structure, medical center directors and the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary for Health, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, veterans service organizations, Congressional liaisons, National Partnership Council and professional nursing organizations.



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The New Standards

The Nurse Qualification Standards establish new education and practice requirements for the appointment and advancement of nurses within the veterans health care system. They establish the baccalaureate degree as the level of educational preparation that VA's registered nurses must have by 2005 to advance beyond entry level. They also put this requirement in place for new appointments immediately.

VHA has earmarked \$50 million over the next five years to assist nurses to attain baccalaureate (or higher) degrees. In order to assure that the educational initiatives are conveniently accessible and innovative, VHA signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. This agreement commits both organizations to seek increased opportunities to bring innovative educational programs to settings that are convenient for VA nurses.

The Nurse Qualification Standards are generic criteria that define the educational,

experiential and competency requirements for each nursing grade and level. These standards are based on the ANA (American Nurses' Association) Standards of Care and Standards of Professional Performance found in the ANA Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice. They incorporate a career development component that specifies the scope of responsibilities and depth and breadth of practice. All nurses are expected to successfully perform activities appropriate to their grade or level.

The new Standards require that the practice of every VA nurse comply with the performance component (see "The Nine Dimensions" on the next page) and an educational component (see Table "The New Educational Requirements" on the next page). Taken together, these components specifically address scope of responsibilities and practice at each level. Successful accomplishment of these dimensions requires effective interpersonal skills.



The Nine Dimensions of Nursing Practice

1) Practice—is the effective use of the nursing process components of assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation and evaluation in varied practice settings

2) Quality of Care—is a measure of how the nurse systematically evaluates and improves the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice and health care delivery

3) Performance—asks that the nurse evaluate his or her own nursing practice as well as performance of others

4) Educational/Career Development—is an indicator of acquisition and use of current knowledge for self and others

5) Collegiality—measures the nurse’s contribution to the professional development of peers, colleagues and others

6) Ethics—indicates the ability of the professional nurse to make decisions and take action in an ethical manner

7) Collaboration—is the analysis of interpersonal skills as they relate to working with clients, significant others and health-care and service providers

8) Research—measures the nurse’s use of research in practice

9) Resource Utilization—assesses the nurse’s consideration of factors related to safety, effectiveness and cost in planning and delivering care

For the sake of comparison, the old standards are activities—or functions—based, rather than based on broader dimensions.

The New Education and Experience Requirements are as follows:

Grade	Education	Experience
Nurse I		
Level 1	AD/Diploma	None
Level 2	AD/Diploma	1 year
Level 3	AD/Diploma	2-3 years
Nurse II	BSN	2-3 years
Nurse III	Master’s	2-3 years
Nurse IV	Master’s	4-5 years
Nurse V	Master’s/Doctorate	5-6 years preferred

Qualification Standards

Nurse 1—Level 1

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

Practice—Uses the nursing process (assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, evaluation). Accurately documents care of clients.

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

Performance—Participates in appraisal of own performance.

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

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

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.

Collaboration—Communicates with the client and health care providers regarding client care.

Research—Assists in identifying problem areas in nursing practice.

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

Nurse 1—Level 2

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

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

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

Performance—Incorporates feedback regarding performance and interpersonal skills to enhance professional development, participates in the performance evaluations of others.

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

Collegiality—Shares knowledge and skills with colleagues/others.

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

Collaboration—Participates effectively on teams to plan and manage care for clients.

Research—Demonstrates awareness of research application to practice.

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



Qualification Standards (continued)

Nurse 1—Level 3

Scope: Demonstrates proficiency in practice based on conscious, deliberate planning. Self-directed in goal-setting for managing complex clients.

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

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

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

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

Collegiality—Provides feedback regarding the practice of others to improve professional practice.

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

Collaboration—Refers, consults, and makes provisions for continuity of care with health care providers.

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

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

Nurse II

Scope: 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.

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

Performance—Evaluates practice of self and others using professional standards, relevant status, and regulations.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

Qualification Standards (continued)

Nurse III

Scope: 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.

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

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

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.

Collegiality—Coaches colleagues in team building. Makes sustained contributions to health care by sharing expertise within the medical center, or external to it.

Ethics—Provides leadership in identifying and addressing ethical issues that impact client and staff, including initiating and participating in ethics consultations.

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

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

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

Nurse IV

Scope: Exhibits 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

(Nurse IV continued on the next page.)



Qualification Standards (continued)

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

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

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

Nurse V

Scope: 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Ethics—Advocates for ethical decision making on behalf of the public and staff. Develops an environment for ethical decision making on behalf of the public and staff.

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

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

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

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The Personal Impact of New Standards

The new standards are much more comprehensive than the ones they replace. They require VA nurses to demonstrate how they are improving their clinical practice and contributing to better health-care delivery systems overall. They also provide VA nurses with new opportunities to promote their specialized skills and reflect their exceptional job performance. In effect, the new standards enable nurses to show that they are anticipating trends in health care and are committed to lifelong professional growth and learning. The education and experience that these standards require nurses to obtain will enrich their practices and enhance their career prospects.

The implementation of the new standards will be accomplished with as few adverse effects as possible for nurses already on

staff. A transition period from the old standards to the new is incorporated to enable currently-employed nurses to obtain the necessary educational requirements and properly plan their futures. However, each nurse will have to meet all nine (9) dimensional standards in each grade to obtain promotion once the new standards are implemented for current employees.

All Title 38 RNs presently employed by the VA will retain their current grade or level under the new standards. Current VA nurses will continue to receive their step increases based on satisfactory performance. Nurses that are hired after the new standards are implemented will be required to comply with new educational requirements immediately upon employment.



Clinical Practice

The new standards include an emphasis on clinical practice and reflect the ability of the nurse to attain promotion while remaining in a clinical role. The emerging health care system fosters staff nurses assuming leadership roles in clinical care settings and new clinical roles, such as the expert nurse clinician, case manager, community health nurse and advanced practice nurse.

The Veterans Health Administration applies the Nurse Qualification Standards through the peer review process inherent in the Nurse Professional Standards Board. All VA nurses and nurse applicants are reviewed by the Nurse Professional Standards Board (NPSB) to determine appropriate grade. The NPSB is comprised of nurses in a variety of roles and grade levels.

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Resources To Assist You

Currently employed nurses who would like to be considered for promotion should develop a plan to obtain the educational degree for the appropriate grade and use the transition period to begin their academic study or complete their degree. It may be possible for currently employed nurses to be promoted during the transition period, if the VA nurse meets the new standards, but has not yet earned the degree.

For more detailed information about educational programs/resources, refer to the Department of Veterans Affairs DVA Registered Nurses' Guide to Educational and Financial Aid Resources that is available in the library at all VA facilities. This guide

lists educational programs throughout the country by locality, as well as distance-learning programs. In addition, each medical center has been provided with information regarding establishing Academic Achievement Environments at the medical center to assist and support nurses pursuing academic degrees.

To obtain additional assistance contact the Chairperson of your Nurse Professional Standards Board, the nurse executive at your medical center and/or the education department at your medical center.



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