

**2025 Membership Assembly
Dialogue Forum Topic #3
Friday, June 27, 2025**

**Revising and Protecting the Role of the RN
Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice**

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Submitted by: Kurt Kless, MSN, MBA, RN, NE-BC, and Ken Fry, MSN, MBA, RN, NE-BC, members of ANA-Ohio. Joined by Danette Culver, MSN, APRN, ACNS-BC, CCRN-K, RN-BC, Co-Chair of the Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice Revision Committee.

Overview: The evolving demands of healthcare have placed increasing pressures on registered nurses, leading to critical challenges related to role clarity, mental health, and workforce sustainability. The current Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, last revised in 2021, no longer sufficiently addresses the realities of modern nursing practice, resulting in role overload, burnout, and rising mental health concerns. RNs are often expected to serve as a catch-all solution for systemic healthcare staffing shortages, leading to role confusion and unsustainable workloads. The lack of clear delineation between RN responsibilities and those of other healthcare professionals contributes to inefficiencies and professional dissatisfaction. The purpose of this discussion is to provide feedback, informed by this proposal, as the revision the current Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (4th edition) moves forward.

Background: ANA is the steward of two of the nursing professions foundational document, the Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (NSSP). These documents work in conjunction with ANA's formal position statements, principles, and other policy documents to articulate the association's views, promote, and support its advocacy efforts that address fundamental issues of the day.

The purpose of the NSSP is to establish the profession's scope of nursing practice and standards of professional nursing practice. The 4th edition of the NSSP, published in 2021, includes a definition of nursing and a discussion of the full range of the scope of nursing practice. The current definition of nursing is as follows:

Nursing integrates the art and science of caring and focuses on the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and human functioning; prevention of illness and injury; facilitation of healing; and alleviation of suffering through compassionate

presence. Nursing is the diagnosis and treatment of human responses and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations in recognition of the connection of all humanity.

The document also includes 18 Standards of Professional Nursing Practice (Appendix A) with associated competencies. The first six standards are the Standards of Practice that describe a competent level of nursing practice. The remaining standards, Standard 7 through 18, are the Standards of Professional Performance which describe a competent level in the professional role. Each one of the 18 Standards of Professional Nursing Practice includes associated competencies at the registered nurse level, as well as at the graduate-level prepared registered nurse, including advanced practice registered nurses.

The NSSP is revised every five years and is currently undergoing a revision for release in 2026. The NSSP also establishes the framework that is used when developing a nursing specialty's scope and standard of professional nursing practice. While the NSSP is principally a U.S. document, it does inform the global profession of nursing.

The proposal submitters note that there are multiple issues confronting nurses and the profession in today's environment that could be either informed by or addressed by the NSSP. These include:

- The need for clear professional boundaries that can prevent role creep and reinforce the specialized expertise that nurses bring to patient care.
- An understanding of the work environment that speaks to workforce retention and the reduction of burnout to ensure that the profession remains strong and resilient.
- Reflecting on the need for mental health support and sustainable workloads, thus positioning nursing as one that prioritizes both high-quality patient care and the well-being of its practitioners.

The revision of the NSSP can speak to the need for nurses to function within a sustainable, clearly defined role, optimizing their contributions to patient care. The evolving demands of healthcare have placed increasing pressures on Registered Nurses (RNs), leading to critical challenges related to role clarity, mental health, and workforce sustainability. The realities of modern nursing practice result in role overload, burnout, and rising mental health concerns. RNs are often expected to serve as a catch-all solution for systemic healthcare staffing shortages, leading to role confusion and unsustainable workloads. The lack of clear delineation between RN responsibilities and those of other healthcare professionals contributes to inefficiencies and professional dissatisfaction.

Registered Nurses make up the largest segment of the healthcare workforce in the United States, playing a critical role in patient care delivery across hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, and community health settings. However, the increasing demands placed on RNs, coupled with role ambiguity, rising burnout rates, and mental health challenges, pose a significant threat to the profession and the broader healthcare infrastructure. The nationwide nursing shortage, exacerbated by high turnover rates and workforce burnout,

has been widely documented, with hospitals and healthcare facilities struggling to recruit and retain nurses. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these issues, revealing systemic weaknesses in nurse staffing, mental health support, and workload management. Without clear professional boundaries and protections for RNs, the reliance on nurses as a stopgap for healthcare system inefficiencies has become unsustainable, leading to high levels of job dissatisfaction and increasing numbers of nurses leaving the profession. This not only threatens patient safety and care quality but also places additional strain on the remaining workforce, creating a cycle of exhaustion and attrition. Mental health challenges among nurses, including high rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicide, have reached alarming levels, necessitating national-level intervention to protect and support the nursing workforce. The lack of comprehensive policies addressing nurse well-being is contributing to a workforce crisis that affects healthcare institutions, policymakers, and the public.

Revising the NSSP provides a significant opportunity to advance nursing practice and the profession. It is important to consider how the issues raised here can be appropriately incorporated into the revised NSSP. For ANA, addressing these issues – whether through the NSSP and/or other advocacy vehicles – is essential to fulfilling its mission of advancing the nursing profession and advocating for nurses' well-being. ANA plays a critical role in shaping national nursing policy, setting professional standards, and ensuring that nurses receive the protections and support they need to thrive.

Conclusion: The revision of the NSSP offers attendees the opportunity to consider how this document can advance policy around role clarity, challenges in the work environment that contribute to retention, burnout, and mental health issues, and contribute to the stability of the work environment. While the proposal submitted has raised specific concerns, attendees are welcome to provide other inputs into consideration for the revision of the NSSP.

Recommendations: The outcome of this Dialogue Forum will inform the revision of the NSSP. This discussion will be shared with the entire revision committee.

References

American Nurses Association (2021). Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (4th Ed.). Silver Spring, MD. ANA.

Standards of Professional Nursing Practice

Standards of Practice

Standard 1. Assessment: The registered nurse collects pertinent data and information relative to the healthcare consumer's health or the situation.

Standard 2. Diagnosis: The registered nurse analyzes assessment data to determine actual or potential diagnoses, problems, and issues.

Standard 3. Outcomes Identification: The registered nurse identifies expected outcomes for plan individualized to the healthcare consumer or the situation.

Standard 4. Planning: The registered nurse develops a collaborative plan encompassing strategies to achieve expected outcomes.

Standard 5. Implementation: The registered nurse implements the identified plan.

Standard 5A. Coordination of Care: The registered nurse coordinates care delivery.

Standard 5B. Health Teaching and Health Promotion: The registered nurse employs strategies to teach and promote health and wellness.

Standard 6. Evaluation: The registered nurse evaluates progress toward attainment of goals and outcomes.

Standards of Professional Performance

Standard 7. Ethics: The registered nurse integrates ethics in all aspects of practice.

Standard 8. Advocacy: The registered nurse demonstrates advocacy in all roles and settings.

Standard 9. Respectful and Equitable Practice: The registered nurse practices with cultural humility and inclusiveness.

Standard 10. Communication: The registered nurse communicates effectively in all areas of professional practice.

Standard 11. Collaboration: The registered nurse collaborates with the healthcare consumer and other key stakeholders.

Standard 12. Leadership: The registered nurse leads within the profession and practice setting.

Standard 13. Education: The registered nurse seeks knowledge and competence that reflects current nursing practice and promotes futuristic thinking.

Standard 14. Scholarly Inquiry: The registered nurse integrates scholarship, evidence, and research findings into practice.

Standard 15. Quality of Practice: The registered nurse contributes to quality nursing practice.

Standard 16. Professional Practice Evaluation: The registered nurse evaluates one's own and other's nursing practice.

Standard 17. Resource Stewardship: The registered nurse utilizes appropriate resources to plan, provide, and sustain evidence-based nursing services that are safe, effective, financially sustainable, and used judiciously.

Standard 18. Environmental Health: The registered nurse practices in a manner that advances environmental safety and health.