



College of  
Registered Nurses  
of Manitoba

# Determining the Scope of Practice of an Individual Registered Nurse

## Fact Sheet

The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (the College) has the legislated responsibility to regulate registered nursing to ensure that the public receives safe, competent care. The Registered Nurses Act Section 2(1) defines the practice of registered nursing as *“the application of nursing knowledge, skill and judgment to promote, maintain and restore health, prevent illness and alleviate suffering.”* It includes, but is not limited to, assessing health status; planning, providing and evaluating treatment and nursing interventions; counseling and teaching to enhance health and well-being; and education, administration and research related to providing health services.

A registered nurse on the extended practice register may do any of the following in the course of engaging in the practice of nursing:

- Order and receive reports of screening and diagnostics tests designated in the regulations.
- Prescribe drugs designated in the regulations.
- Perform minor surgical and invasive procedures designated in the regulations.

This document provides direction for critically analyzing decisions regarding the scope of practice of individual registered nurses. Factors to consider when making decisions regarding the registered nurse’s scope of practice are:

### Is There a Public Need?

The needs of the people of Manitoba must be at the centre of any decision to extend the scope of practice of an individual registered nurse. Public need may be determined by a number of methods, such as agency annual reports, quality monitoring programs, requests for services from the public, or from local, provincial and national needs assessments.

### Are Stakeholders in Agreement?

The overlap in the scopes of practice or shared competencies of health care professionals are areas of common ability to provide services. Collaborative decision making facilitates coordination and integration of care. Other stakeholders may include those financing the health service, other health care professionals and the public. The determination of whether or not a registered nurse will provide a service should be mutually agreed upon by the registered nurse and other health care professionals involved in providing the service.

## Is There Practice Setting Support?

Any decision to extend the scope of practice of a registered nurse should reflect a fit with the practice of nursing and complement the registered nurse's ability to provide safe, ethical care. The registered nurse must be able to meet the standards of practice for both the new and continuing nursing responsibilities.

Employers have the responsibility to provide policies and procedures, orientation, and staff development programs based on identified learning and practice needs, and to ensure the provision of the necessary resources for nurses to attain and maintain competency.

Registered nurses have the right and responsibility to question practices which are inconsistent with safe patient care, desired patient outcomes, the Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses, and the College's Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses. No agency policy or professional statement can relieve individual registered nurses of the accountability for their own actions.

## Can Liability Protection Needs Be Met?

Professional liability is the legal risk inherent in the provision of professional nursing services to a client. Manitoba nurses have protection through the Canadian Nurses Protective Society for the provision of services that the College considers the scope of practice of registered nurses. Registered nurses and employers should evaluate the need for additional liability protection beyond the level provided through registration with the College.

## Is This Service Within the Legislated Scope of Practice of the Individual Registered Nurse?

The scope of practice of a profession is the range of services that the profession is authorized to provide. The scope of practice of the registered nurse is broad and sometimes overlaps with the scope of practice of other professions. The scope of practice of a registered nurse is defined by the Registered Nurses Act, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, entry-level nursing education programs, post-basic nursing education programs and the individual nurse's acquired competencies. Questions regarding the scope of practice of registered nurses should be referred to the College.

## Does this Service Meet the Registered Nurses Act Provisions for "Included Practices"?

The Registered Nurses Act will enable registered nurses to provide a number of services as part of their own scope of practice. At the current time, regulations are being developed to allow registered nurses who meet the regulations to do the following in the course of engaging in the practice of nursing:

- Order and receive reports of screening and diagnostics tests designated in the regulations.
- Prescribe drugs designated in the regulations.
- Perform minor surgical and invasive procedures designated in the regulations.

Questions regarding the authority of individual registered nurses to provide these services should be directed to the College.

## Is The Registered Nurse Competent To Provide The Service?

In many cases, the practice of nursing is specialized, requiring registered nurses to have specific competencies in order to manage complex care. Competence requires the integration of knowledge, skills, judgment and personal characteristics in order to practice safely and ethically. Competence is more than the ability to perform skills and techniques. Competence involves the ability to assess the situation, to understand the underlying factors contributing to the situation, to intervene appropriately, to be able to predict the outcome of an intervention, and to be able to respond with alternate interventions in the event of a lack of response or an untoward response to the intervention. The Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses provide guidelines for competent practice. Assessment of competence can be achieved through a combination of strategies including self-assessment, peer review, performance appraisal, and certification. Individual registered nurses should not perform any service or procedure for which they are not competent.

## Can Competence Be Developed?

Competence requires that the registered nurse meet performance standards for knowledge, skills, and judgment. Knowledge requirements may include content such as an understanding of pathophysiology, pharmacology, systems theory, or the determinants of health. Skills include such complex things as assessment, technical skills, interpersonal skills and client education skills. Judgment competencies include clinical decision making skills, managing complications and unexpected events, identifying the need for referral, consultation and collaboration, and modifying therapy. Educational and practice opportunities need to be developed to ensure that registered nurses can develop competence for the planned professional service.

## Can Competence Be Maintained?

Competence is maintained through practice and a commitment to life long learning. Competence is best achieved when there are sufficient opportunities to practice over time. A process must be developed to ensure continued competence.

## Implementation and Evaluation

Once implemented, periodic evaluation of the implemented service should include evaluation of each of the steps outlined in this document.

## Summary

The knowledge and skills of health professions are evolving at a rapid pace. Over time, practices once seen as the domain of a particular profession have been integrated into the scope of practice of another profession. Registered nurses have an essential role in the delivery of health care services in a wide range of practice settings. The role of the registered nurse is broad. In many cases, the practice of registered nursing is specialized, requiring nurses to have specific knowledge, skills, and judgment required to competently manage complex care. Health care professions need to remain flexible regarding scope of practice issues and, at the same time, make careful, informed decisions regarding changes to the scope of practice.

## Resources

- *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*

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