

ACHA Guidelines

Scope of Practice for the Registered Nurse in College Health

Introduction and Guiding Principles

The American College Health Association (ACHA) supports and recognizes the need for hiring well-qualified college health registered nurses (RNs) to provide cost-effective nursing care and services within institutions of higher education. With the discontinuation of a national exam certification by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), ACHA appointed a task force to study processes by which to recognize college health RNs and develop professional standards of college nursing practice.

Leveraging the results of past collaboration with ANCC on alternative approaches to college health RN recognition, the ACHA College Health Nursing Competencies Recognition Task Force developed the following guiding principles and standards of practice, first published in 2014. The knowledge, skills, and abilities set forth in these standards describe the scope of practice of RNs in college health. In addition to guiding the college health RN, this information may also be used by administrators in need of clear definitions of nursing roles and responsibilities to assist in the recruitment and retention of RNs who work in health care centers within institutions of higher education.

Nursing Practice

ACHA embraces the following description and expectations for nursing as set forth by the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN):

The ANA describes nursing as “the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations” (n.d.-a).

In 2012 the ANA endorsed a position statement from the AAACN. In 2011, the AAACN released the following positions statement, which was [endorsed by the ANA](#) in 2012:

It is the position of the AAACN that:

- RNs enhance patient safety and the quality and effectiveness of care delivery and are thus essential and irreplaceable in the provision of patient care services in the ambulatory setting.
- RNs are responsible for the design, administration, and evaluation of professional nursing services within an organization in accordance with the framework established by state nurse practice acts, nursing scope of practice, and organizational standards of care.
- RNs provide the leadership necessary for collaboration and coordination of services, which includes defining the appropriate skill mix and delegation of tasks among licensed and unlicensed health care workers. (When delegating, the ultimate responsibility lies with the RN; the nurse should ensure the use of the five rights [Barrow and Sharma, 2020] and evaluation post task to close out the loop. When needed they shall provide feedback and training [Hopkins, et al., 2012].
- RNs are fully accountable in all ambulatory care settings for all nursing services and associated patient outcomes provided under their direction.

It is ACHA’s position that college health RNs have the public health education and experience to enhance the institution’s ability to effectively respond to emergencies, epidemics, and pandemics.

Types of Nursing Positions

Positions in college health nursing can range from administration to staff positions and encompass generalists to specialists (e.g., Ambulatory Care Nursing Certification). Licensed nursing personnel also hold different levels of educational preparation (e.g., diploma, associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral).

All licensed nursing personnel must hold a current license to render nursing care within their respective state of employment. Regardless of educational preparation, all qualified nurses should be competent

in conducting health needs assessments for their assigned community; selecting priority health issues and measuring nursing objectives; designing and implementing evidence-based nursing interventions and actions for plans of care; evaluating the effectiveness of these identified actions; and reporting patient-focused/learning outcomes (Butler, 2002, pp. 141-152).

Types and Purposes of Campus Health Centers

Most institutions of higher education across the nation offer some form of student-focused health care service. Campus health care centers range from first aid centers to comprehensive health centers with specialty medical care. In addition, there are several models of campus health services available, e.g., primary care, ambulatory care, urgent care, and acute/emergent care (Perez, 2011, p. 33).

In the ANA “Scope and Standards of College Health Nursing Practice” the mission of college health nursing is to enhance students’ higher education experience by modifying and removing health-related barriers to learning, promoting optimal wellness, enabling individuals to make informed decisions about health-related concerns, and empowering students to be self-directed and well-informed consumers of health care services (Butler, 2002, pp. 142-143).

RNs working in college health are active, energized health professionals with a unity of purpose: to advance the health and learning of our nation’s students. The approaches to achieving this purpose are as diverse as the models of health centers. Whether the student receives health support from a single-room, nurse-directed program or from a multi-staffed, multi-building environment, campus health centers focus on improving and advancing the health of students (Perez 2011, p. 35).

The Nursing Process

According to the ANA (n.d.-b), “the common thread uniting different types of nurses who work in varied areas is the nursing process—the essential core of practice for the registered nurse to deliver holistic, patient- focused care.” The nursing process is cyclical and on-going and can end at any of the following stages if the identified problem is solved. The process is goal-directed and patient-centered and always in collaboration with the patient (ANA, 2019b).

The ANA lists the following stages of the nursing process:

Assessment:

“An RN uses a systematic, dynamic way to collect subjective and objective data about a patient, the first step in delivering nursing care. Assessment includes not only physiological data but psychological, sociocultural, spiritual, economic, and life-style factors as well” (ANA, n.d.-b).

Methods used to collect this data include patient interview, physical examination, health/dietary history, family history, diagnostic data, and observation. To enhance health, it is vital that a nursing assessment identifies the patient’s problem(s), risks, and outcomes for enhancing health. The use of evidence-based nursing should guide assessments that support nursing diagnoses.

Diagnosis:

“The nursing diagnosis is the nurse’s clinical judgment about the client’s response to actual or potential health conditions or needs” (ANA, n.d.-b). Nursing diagnoses are developed based on data obtained during the nursing assessment.

Outcomes/Planning:

In agreement with the patient, the nurse sets patient goals (e.g., resolving conflict through counseling or managing pain through adequate medication) to address problems identified in the diagnosing phase. When there are multiple nursing diagnoses to be addressed, the nurse prioritizes diagnoses according to severity and potential for causing more serious harm. For each problem, a measurable goal/outcome is then set. For each goal/outcome, the nurse selects nursing interventions that will help achieve the desired goal/outcome (ANA, n.d.-b).

Implementation:

The nurse implements the plan of care and performs the determined interventions that were identified to help meet the goals/outcomes that were agreed upon by the patient and the nurse (ANA, n.d.-b). Some tasks within the determined intervention may be delegated to other individuals involved in the patient’s care.

Evaluation:

The nurse evaluates the patient’s progress toward achieving the goals/outcomes identified in the previous phases and documents updates in the patient’s health record. If progress towards achieving the goal is slow, or if regression has occurred, the nurse must then change the plan of care accordingly (ANA, n.d.-b).

The description and expectations for nursing practice, coupled with this five-stage cyclical process, serve as tenets to college health nursing. A description of the college health nursing standards of practice is set forth herein.

College Health Nursing Standards of Practice

Standard 1: Education

Knowledge:

- Acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to practice in college health.
- Seek and participate in ongoing educational opportunities related to clinical knowledge and enhancing professional skills.
- Understand health care systems.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Apply the nursing process.
- Execute ethical principles in decision making.
- Integrate evidence supported information and methodologies into current practice.
- Apply codes and standards of professional practice as established in the Nurse Practice Acts for the states in which the RN practices.
- Understand and comply with licensure laws for the state in which the RN practices.

Standard 2: Nursing Process

Knowledge:

- Understand pathophysiology.
- Understand stages of development.
- Construct nursing diagnoses.
- Identify campus community resources and services.
- Understand levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary) in patient care.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Collect client data, including physical and mental health assessments of patients.
- Utilize patient assessment tools.
- Conduct cultural assessment.

- Apply the nursing process to provide developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and diverse patient-centered medical and mental health care to individuals served within the campus community.
- Analyze assessment data to determine a diagnosis, identify expected individualized outcomes and develop a care plan to attain those outcomes, implement the plan of care, and evaluate for progress.
- Apply basic nursing clinical procedures.
- Incorporate self-care, health promotion, disease prevention, and wellness theories.
- Demonstrate compliance with HIPAA and FERPA.
- Provide care for emergent/urgent, acute illness, and chronic illness situations as allowed by the facility and state's nurse practice act.
- Identify health related barriers to learning.
- Identify potential obstacles in health equity.

Standard 3: Collegiality

Knowledge:

- Understand current the Nurse Practice Act for the state in which the RN practices.
- Identify patient rights and responsibilities in the current practice location.
- Understand the patient advocate role.
- Understand current HIPAA and FERPA requirements.
- Review utilization management of the current practice location.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Initiate relationships with the individual patient (including the patient's significant other or support system, if necessary), other members of the campus community, and health care providers to provide college health services which demonstrate and support learning outcomes.
- Collaborate with the individual and other stakeholders to provide patient care, patient education, and promote continuity of care.
- Contribute to the professional development of peers, colleagues, and other staff.

- Support and promote a patient advocate role.
- Practice HIPAA and FERPA requirements for confidentiality and need to know when collaborating with others.
- Apply learning outcome theory.
- Participate in utilization management.

Standard 4: Ethics

Knowledge:

- Understand current state of nursing practice's Nurse Practice Standards.
- List the current, relevant nursing practice laws and regulations for the state in which the RN practices.
- Review administrative and departmental policies and procedures which govern nursing practice in the state in which the RN practices.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Perform self-evaluation of one's own nursing practice in relation to professional practice standards and relevant laws and regulations.
- Perform frequent self-evaluation of one's own nursing practice in relation to ethics.
- Provide nursing services in an organized manner to meet the existing needs and identify the future needs of the individual.
- Provide care and support of patient's decisions in an ethical manner.

Standard 5: Collaboration

Knowledge:

- List other departments on campus.
- Review appropriate data sources, including valid and reliable college health surveys, assessment findings, and other collateral student services data to determine retention-related health behaviors, protective and risk behaviors, and students' perceptions about these behaviors.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Identify opportunities to collaborate with other departments within the university.
- Collaborate with community members to plan, assess, identify outcomes, implement, and evaluate college health services and community health services when applicable.

- Identify team building and consensus building skills.
- Collaborate to develop and implement policies and procedures directed towards improving quality of care.
- Utilize appropriate data sources to improve and evaluate healthcare access, care provided, and student reported behaviors and attitudes.
- Implement evidence supported strategies for targeted individual, group, and community student health behaviors based on valid and reliable data.

Standard 6: Research, Quality Improvement, and Quality of Practice

Knowledge:

- Evaluate available data collection tools.
- Understand current research tools and theories.
- Discuss awareness of current quality improvement measures at the current practice location.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Conduct quality review of data to identify opportunities for improving care.
- Utilize appropriate indicators to monitor quality and effectiveness of care provided.
- Utilize interventions substantiated by research and quality implementation activities at the current practice location.
- Conduct systemic evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the college health nursing practice.
- Collaborate with interdisciplinary and interdepartmental quality review teams.
- Conduct consistent assessment and monitoring for improvement opportunities.

Standard 7: Professional Practice Evaluation

Knowledge:

- Review the timed evaluations conducted at the current practice location.
- Understand the nursing standards, laws, and regulations of the state in which the RN practices.
- Review the expectations set forth by the current practice location.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Complete self-assessment tools as offered by the current practice location.
- Evaluate the RN's current practice in relation to professional practice standards, laws, and regulations of the state in which the RN is practicing.
- Participate in evaluations with immediate supervisor as timed and as needed.
- Identify strengths and areas for professional and personal growth.
- Utilize learning outcomes.
- Utilize constructive feedback for positive development.

Standard 8: Resource Utilization and Leadership

Knowledge:

- List staff resources available at the current practice location and through the main human resources office.
- Review leadership within the current practice location as well as the university.
- List interpersonal communication skills and offered classes to development these skills.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Describe the factors that affect planning and delivering patient care (e.g., safety, effectiveness, budget).
- Describe the organization chart at the current practice location.
- Identify leadership opportunities.

- Utilize goal setting as it relates to patient-centered collaborative treatment planning and establishment of personalized self-managed goals.
- Utilize referrals and other resources within the health care setting and campus community.
- Implement performance improvement strategies.
- Demonstrate effective use of interpersonal communication skills to enhance teamwork effectiveness.

Standard 9: Communication

Knowledge:

- Understand active communication skills.
- Understand adult learning outcomes.
- Review copyright infringement.

Skills and Abilities/Proficiencies:

- Promote patient activity in health wellness, health protection and disease prevention services for individuals and groups.
- Provide communication through writing, publications, presentations, and participation in professional and community groups to self-promote optimal physical and mental health and well-being.
- Practice public speaking skills.
- Incorporate levels of prevention in messaging.
- Communicate patient rights and responsibilities.
- Avoid copyright infringement.
- Address health related barriers to learning.

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