North Carolina Nurses Association Position Statement on Psychiatric-Mental Health Advanced Practice Registered Nursing

This position statement does not imply endorsement of any piece of related legislation.

Statement of the Issue

Traditionally, the psychiatric-mental health advanced practice Registered Nurse in North Carolina has functioned as a master's prepared Psychiatric-Mental Health Clinical Nurse Specialist (PMH-CNS) and has, in addition to other role functions, provided psychotherapy services to individuals, families and groups. In North Carolina, all Clinical Nurse Specialists practice under the sole authority of the NC Board of Nursing.

In contrast, at the present time in this state, the performance of specific medical acts, including prescriptive authority, is granted to Nurse Practitioners who function under the joint auspices of the Board of Nursing and the Medical Board.

The continuing presence of the PMH-CNS and the introduction of the psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner (PMH-NP) in North Carolina has prompted the need to clarify the necessary educational preparation and credentialing requirements, the scope and functions of practice and the authority to practice under psychiatric-mental health advanced practice titles designated by the state and recognized by the profession at the national level.

Background

In the Scope and Standards of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, the American Nurses Association, the American Psychiatric Nurses Association, and the International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses identified a single scope of practice and a blended role for the psychiatric-mental health advanced practice psychiatric nurse (APRN-PMH). This national document defines the APRN-PMH as “a licensed Registered Nurse who is educationally prepared either as a clinical nurse specialist or a nurse practitioner at least at the master’s degree level in the specialty of psychiatric-mental health nursing.” (1, p.19) The document further states that “Psychiatric-mental health advanced practice nursing involves the delivery of comprehensive primary mental health care in a variety of settings.” (1, p.15).

The document identifies the following functional parameters of the advanced practice role in the specialty (1, pp. 19-23):

- carrying out health promotion activities including general health teaching
- designing and conducting mental illness preventive interventions
- conducting health screening and evaluation
- eliciting a history appropriate to the patient, presentation, and setting
- completing a health assessment/examination
- formulating differential diagnoses based on clinical findings
- ordering, conducting, and interpreting pertinent laboratory and diagnostic studies and procedures
- conducting individual, family, group, and network psychotherapy
• directing and providing home health services to mental health patients
• prescribing, monitoring, managing, and evaluating psychopharmacological and related medications
• providing integrated mental health services in general health settings facilitating psychiatric rehabilitation.

This document, written by representatives of three prominent nursing organizations, affirms the need for psychiatric-mental health clinical nurse specialists and psychiatric nurse practitioners who provide primary mental health care for persons at risk for or diagnosed with psychiatric disorders and their families to have advanced formal preparation at the master’s or doctorate level. This preparation includes course work and clinical practice in the:

• maintenance of mental health
• prevention of mental illness
• diagnosis and management of mental illness
• psychiatric-mental health nursing theories and related mental health developmental and psychiatric treatment content
• didactic content and supervised clinical practice in individual, group and family psychotherapies
• preparation in patho-physiology, pharmacology and psychopharmacology (2).

The state of North Carolina, while not directly addressing the specialty of psychiatric-mental health nursing, does, through the rules and regulations of the Nurse Practice Act, specify that in order to be recognized as a Clinical Nurse Specialist, the individual Registered Nurse must have completed advanced formal academic preparation with supervised clinical practice in a clinical nursing specialty and be currently certified in a clinical specialty by a national certifying body. Requirements for approval by the Medical Board and the Board of Nursing as a Nurse Practitioner include completion of a nurse practitioner educational program and current certification by a national credentialing body in the nurse practitioner’s specialty area of practice.

The NC Board of Nursing, through its rules and regulations, has also identified advanced level nursing functions for all Clinical Nurse Specialists and approval and practice parameters for all Nurse Practitioners practicing in North Carolina. (4, 5, 6)

**Position Statement**

In keeping with these resources, the NCNA Council of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses in Advanced Practice takes the position that a nurse in North Carolina who uses the title of Psychiatric-Mental Health Clinical Nurse Specialist:

• must be currently registered to practice nursing in this state
• must hold a master’s degree or have completed formal academic post-master’s preparation from an accredited university in the specialty of psychiatric-mental health nursing
• must have current certification as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Adult Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing or a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Child and Adolescent Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing by a national certifying body (RN,CS or APRN, BC).
A nurse in North Carolina who uses the title of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner:

- must be currently registered to practice nursing in this state
- must hold a master’s degree or have completed formal academic post-master’s preparation from an accredited university in the specialty of psychiatric-mental health nursing
- must be currently certified as either an Adult Psychiatric and Mental Health Nurse Practitioner or a Family Psychiatric and Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (RN-CS or APRN, BC) and
- must meet the requirements of the North Carolina Board of Nursing for approval as a nurse practitioner.

References


History

Adopted: 06/1/04 Council of Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurses in Advanced Practice; NCNA Board of Directors
Revised: 04/29/2011 Council of Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurses in Advanced Practice; Commission on Standards and Professional Practice; NCNA Board of Directors