



Employing a Nurse in the General Practice Setting

The role of the practice nurse

The role of the practice nurse in Australia has broadened considerably in recent years, largely due to increased recognition of practice nursing as a specialist area, provision of government incentives and the introduction of Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) item numbers relevant to general practice nursing.

The extended role of the practice nurse and the introduction of associated MBS item numbers provide the practice nurse with the opportunity to contribute to the multi-disciplinary practice team, resulting in improved access to primary care services for the patient. Employing a practice nurse may also assist in the reduction of patient waiting times and workforce pressures on the general practitioner.

Professional issues

Nurses are legally bound by a framework of core professional standards that makes them accountable and responsible for their own actions within nursing practice.

All registered and enrolled nurses are advised by the Nurses and Midwifery Board of Australia to work within their scope of practice and competency level, and the policies established by the individual general practice.

The duties of a practice nurse

A practice nurse may be a registered nurse (RN) or an enrolled nurse (EN). The duties undertaken by a practice nurse are varied, dependent on a range of factors including the skills of the nurse and the location and demographics of the general

practice. The duties a practice nurse can perform within the general practice environment may include:

Clinical tasks

Perform ECGs, spirometry, audiometry, undertake ear syringing, engage in health promotion activities, administration of medication and monitoring of Schedule 8 drugs, wound management and dressings, provide assistance with minor surgical procedures, triaging of patients, administer immunisations when directed by the GP and provide assistance with health assessments and chronic disease management activities.

Administrative tasks

Maintain treatment room stock, infection control, cold chain, equipment sterilisation and maintenance, accreditation compliance, and manage practice recall systems and disease registers.

Duties of the registered nurse versus the enrolled nurse

In some circumstances duties that may be undertaken by a registered nurse vary from those that can be performed by the enrolled nurse.

It is the responsibility of the practice to ensure that the enrolled nurse is educated, competent and confident for any nursing activity they undertake.

Whilst all care has been taken in preparing this document, this information is a guide only and subject to change without notice.

Practice Assist is an initiative of



WA Primary Health Alliance is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the PHN Program.

Rural Health West is funded by the Australian Government and the WA Country Health Service.

Can enrolled nurses administer medicines?

Yes. Enrolled nurses who **can** administer medicines **do not have a notation** on their registration. This means they have successfully completed enrolled nurse medication administration education.

Enrolled nurses who **cannot** administer medicines **have the notation 'Does not hold Board-approved qualification in administration of medicines'** on their registration.

Enrolled nurse supervision

Enrolled nurses are registered with the Nurses and Midwifery Board of Australia and are appropriately qualified nurses who can perform a wide range of nursing activities. However, the enrolled nurse cannot practise independently and must be supervised by a registered nurse. Enrolled nurses practising independently are deemed to be working outside of their scope of practice.

Where an enrolled nurse is employed in the practice it is important that the practice has a policy in place describing clear pathways for professional supervision by the registered nurse. A general practitioner cannot supervise an enrolled nurse.

Nursing registration

General practices should establish workplace processes for ensuring that nurse registration is current. The Public Register for all nurses currently registered to practise in Australia is found on the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority (AHPRA) website at www.ahpra.gov.au. Alternatively, AHPRA may be contacted directly on 1300 419 495.

Professional indemnity insurance

Individual professional indemnity policies held by GPs may not cover other members of the practice team. GPs and general practices need to ensure indemnity policies cover all members of staff. Practice indemnity policies are available to cover members of staff who may not be covered under an individual professional indemnity policy.

Continuing professional development

Continuing professional development is critical to the practice nurse role and to quality patient care. Professional development undertaken can include courses, supervised clinical practice, reflective practice in conjunction with personal study, mentoring and networking activities.

Engaging a practice nurse

The two primary options for engaging a practice nurse in general practice are engaging the practice nurse as an independent contractor or engaging the practice nurse as an employee.

All practice nurses should have a written contract with the general practice outlining the terms and conditions of employment.

Western Australia has a minimum pay rate and conditions that need to be met when employing practice nurses. These are available from the Department of Commerce, Labour Relations Division website at www.commerce.wa.gov.au/LabourRelations

Practice Assist provides template employment agreements for practice nurses. Contact support@practiceassist.com.au for your free copy.

Competency standards

The Nurses and Midwifery Board of Australia has developed a professional framework for nursing practise using a set of national standards and codes. The core standards are:

Codes of ethics for:

- Midwives
- Nurses

Codes of professional conduct for:

- Midwives
- Nurses

Professional practice guidelines for:

- Nursing and midwifery – Advertising of regulated health services
- Nursing and midwifery – Guidelines for mandatory notifications

Guidelines covering:

- Competency standards
- Decision making framework
- Registration standards
- Principles for the assessment of national competency standards
- Professional boundaries
- Re-entry to practice policy

These standards and codes can be used by:

- Individual nurses to assess his or her own performance or the performance of their peers.
- Regulatory authorities to assess nurses involved in professional misconduct matters.

- Higher and vocational education authorities who use competency standards as a framework for course development.
- Employers who use competency standards for employment assessment and development of job description forms.
- The profession, for communication to consumers of the standards which can be expected from a registered or enrolled nurse.

Standards and codes

The Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia is a set of expected national standards of nursing conduct for Australian nurses.

The Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia outlines the ethical standards expected and required of nurses practising in Australia.

The standards and codes are available from the AHPRA website at
<http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx>

The Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANF) has developed an online information kit to assist nurses, GPs, practice managers and education providers to use the competency standards. The online information kit is available from the ANF website at
<http://anmf.org.au/pages/national-practice-standards-for-nurses-in-general-practice>

Useful links and resources

The following websites will provide further information on practice nurse employment, regulations, continuing professional development and resources:

Australian Government Department of Health, Primary Care (GP, nursing, allied health)

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mbs-primary-care>

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

<https://www.ahpra.gov.au/>

Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation

www.anmf.org.au

Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association

<https://www.apna.asn.au/>

Department of Commerce, Labour relations

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/labour-relations>

Health Department of Western Australia

<http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/>

Healthy Practices (by APNA)

<http://healthypractices.apna.asn.au/>

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia

<http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/>