



National Association of Neonatal Nurses

Position Statement #3011 RN Practice Experience And Neonatal Advanced Nursing Practice

Recent trends to standardize the credentialing of advanced practice nurses and the increased use of specialty certification as a requirement for entry into practice for nurses practitioners prompted the National Certification Corporation of the Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing Specialties (NCC) to discontinue its requirement for registered nurse (RN) practice as part of the eligibility criteria for its nurse practitioner examinations.¹ Although the National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN) supports the decision of NCC, NANN believes that a solid foundation of basic RN practice experience is essential for neonatal advanced nursing practice. Furthermore, NANN believes that it is the responsibility of the specialty organization, in conjunction with the education community, to articulate the standards for advanced nursing practice.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) Social Policy Statement describes two levels of nursing practice—basic (generic) and advanced.² Advanced nursing practice builds on generic practice. Graduate education transforms generic nursing practice into advanced practice—characterized by increased “complexity of decision making, leadership, the capacity to negotiate complex organizations, and expanded practice skills and knowledge.”³

According to nursing scholars, the central competency of advanced nursing practice is expert clinical practice.³⁻⁶ Clinical expertise develops along a continuum from novice to expert, and from a combination of formal education and knowledge attained through professional practice.⁷ Sparacino refers to the advanced practice nurse as an “expert by experience who excels in analysis and insight.”⁸

Advanced practice nurses are expected to demonstrate leadership. An important aspect of leadership is directing the provision of care for a particular client or patient population.³⁻⁶ Ads Davies notes, leadership “includes guiding other nurses in acquiring clinical skills and knowledge.”⁵ It logically follows that effective leaders are those who have developed mastery of the clinical skills and knowledge they are expected to direct.

In the current health care climate of increased emphasis on high-quality, cost-effective care, it is economical, or realistic to expect the graduate nursing education community to provide the knowledge and experience necessary to develop clinical expertise in generic neonatal nursing practice. Graduate nursing programs must focus on expanding existing content to new skills and knowledge of neonatal advanced nursing practice.

No formal research defines the amount of time needed to achieve expertise. One of the foremost nursing scholars on the subject, Patricia Benner, said, “Clinical knowledge is gained over time...,” and “Experience is, therefore, a prerequisite for expertise.”⁷ Other authors state that the development of expertise occurs after several years of employment.⁹ According to NCC, nurse practitioner candidates with fewer than two years of specialty nursing experience had the highest failure rate on certification exam.¹⁰

It is the position of NANN that RN practice experience in neonatal nursing must be a requirement for enrollment in advanced practice programs. Although we recognize that staff nurse positions are decreasing, making it harder for new RNs to obtain specialty experience, NANN believes that this experience is fundamental to successful advanced nursing practice. Therefore, NANN endorses a minimum of two years full time or its equivalent of recent RN practice experience in neonatal nursing prior to beginning any graduate neonatal nursing courses and/or supervised clinical experience. We also believe that the majority of RN practice experience should be obtained in a level III neonatal intensive care unit.

References

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