



Contents

Introduction and Purpose	2
Requisite skills and abilities	2
Categories of Requisite Skills and Abilities	3
Cognitive	3
Behavioral	3
Communication	4
Interpersonal	4
Physical	4
Sensory Perceptual	4
Environmental	5
Conclusion	5
References	5

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Introduction and Purpose

The Nova Scotia College of Nursing is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants.

This document is intended for potential students, family, admission officers, nursing faculty, disability and equity officers and the general public. The purpose is to inform the reader of the general demands and performance expected of a registered nurse. The information may be useful to a perspective student in identifying his or her potential fit with the requirements of registered nursing as a career choice and /or identifying areas potentially requiring accommodation¹.

A registered nurse's education prepares them with the foundation to practise competently within the health care team. The practice of a registered nurse encompasses clinical practice, administration, education, research, consultation, management, regulation, policy, and system development. Newly graduated registered nurses have the theoretical and practical knowledge to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care. They are prepared to provide individualized nursing care to people of all ages and genders across the spectrum of diversity², in situations related to health promotion, prevention and population health; altered health status, including acute and chronic health conditions and rehabilitative care; and, hospice, palliative and end-of-life care. Newly graduated RNs are prepared as generalists to practise in diverse practice environments, ranging from large urban to remote rural settings (e.g., hospitals, communities, homes, clinics, schools, residential facilities).

By the completion of their education program, all nursing students must demonstrate the capacity to meet NSCN's Entry- Level Competencies for Registered Nurse Practice in Nova Scotia)and be able to practise within the context of the NSCN's Standards of Nursing Practice. Approved nursing education programs are required to provide a breadth of nursing knowledge and varied practice learning opportunities to enable students to achieve entry-level competencies.

Requisite skills and abilities

Certain basic skills and abilities are required for a student to attain the Entry-Level Competencies for Registered Nurse Practice in Nova Scotia. Requisite skills and abilities (RSA) are defined as the essential skills and abilities necessary for admission to and progression through a program and initial registration in the profession. (CRNBC, 2015). In other words, RSAs are those foundational skills and abilities that enable nurse students (with or without accommodation) to achieve the entry-level competencies for registered nurses.

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Act (2013) prohibits discrimination on a number of characteristics including physical and mental disabilities³. The document, Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-secondary Educational Institutions (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2010), is an excellent resource for faculty, and disability and equity officers requiring information about appropriate student accommodation, examples of accommodation and relevant case law. The Alberta Human Rights Commission stipulates that accommodation does not require post secondary institutions to lower the academic or non-academic standards to accommodate students with disabilities nor does it relieve students of the responsibility to develop the essential skills and competencies i.e., meet entry-level competency requirements.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that where the educational environment has a discriminatory effect on students with disabilities, the post secondary institution is required to provide accommodation up to the point of undue hardship. They are required to provide accommodation that overcomes the discriminatory effect but are not required to choose the most expensive or comprehensive level of accommodation.

¹ Accommodation is the adjustment of a rule, practice, condition, or requirement to take into account the specific needs of an individual or group with one or more of the protected characteristics in the Human Rights Act.

² The concept of diversity recognizes that each person is unique and encompasses but is not limited to a person's age, ethnicity, socio-economics' status, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, educational background, religious beliefs, political beliefs and geographical location.

³ No person shall discriminate against a class of individuals on account of age; race; color; religion; creed; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; physical or mental disability; an irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease; ethnic, national or aboriginal origin; family status; marital status; source of income; political belief, affiliation or activity; and that individual's association with another individual or class of individuals having characteristics referred to in the aforementioned examples.(Human Rights Act and Regulations , 1991)

Although there is limited research in the area of students with disabilities, NSCN and nursing education programs in Nova Scotia have identified an increasing number of students requesting accommodation throughout their studies and for the national examination. Informing prospective students of program expectations allows them to identify if nursing is an appropriate career choice and/or identify areas potentially requiring accommodation. The Information Sheet, adapted from CRNBC resources, provides information about the general intellectual, behavioral, emotional, and physical demands and performance expectations of a registered nurse education.

Anyone who has concerns whether they have the RSAs for admission to or progression through a registered nurse education program should contact the institution where they intend to apply, e.g., the disability office and/or educational program. A perspective applicant must be prepared to disclose the nature of his or her disability and relevant information to assist in determining eligible accommodation. The information will be treated in a confidential manner by the educational institution that will work with the perspective student to determine whether reasonable accommodation can be achieved.

Universities and regulatory bodies must balance their obligations to uphold individual rights with the requirement to ensure graduates of approved programs achieve entry-level competencies for safe, competent, compassionate and ethical nursing practice.

Categories of Requisite Skills and Abilities

The following requisite skills and abilities were developed by CRNBC and are organized in seven categories.

COGNITIVE

1. Remember information over a brief period of time
2. Remember information from past experiences
3. Problem-solve to develop professional judgment
4. Reason to develop professional judgment
5. Exercise critical inquiry⁴ skills to develop professional judgment.
6. Apply mathematical skills and abilities in order to:
 - add, subtract, multiply and divide
 - calculate ratios, percentages and apply algebraic equations

Examples: The student can make sense of complex knowledge; use knowledge and theory appropriately; uses past experience to inform current decision-making.

BEHAVIORAL

1. Manage own behaviour well enough to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care
2. Engage with self and others to create a safe environment
3. Respond appropriately in situations that are stressful or that involve conflict.
4. React appropriately to giving and receiving physical touch and working in close proximity with a full range of clients.
5. Fulfill responsibility as part of a team
6. Manage time appropriately

Examples: The student remains calm in stressful situations; recognizes client priorities; and responds appropriately in conflict situations.

⁴ This term expands the meaning of critical thinking to encompass critical reflection on actions. Critical inquiry means a process of purposive thinking and reflective reasoning where practitioners examine ideas, assumptions, principles, conclusions, beliefs and actions in the context of nursing practice.

COMMUNICATION

1. Speak and understand spoken English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings and includes the ability to understand complex medical and technical knowledge.
2. Write and understand written English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings
3. Recognize own non verbal signals and interpret those received from others while considering individual difference in expression and associated meaning

Examples: The student recognizes own non-verbal behavior; demonstrates awareness that individual behavior has different meanings; listens appropriately to clients.

INTERPERSONAL

1. Develop professional relationships and rapport with individuals and groups for the purpose of education, support and counseling.
2. Recognize the needs of clients and colleagues.
3. Recognize the importance of maintaining interpersonal boundaries.

Examples: The student recognizes the importance of maintaining interpersonal boundaries with clients; supports clients to make healthy choices; recognizes the importance of client perspectives and feelings.

PHYSICAL

Ability to perform each of the following requisites well enough to provide client care and participate in educational activities:

1. Stand and maintain balance
2. Manual dexterity
3. Move within limited spaces
4. Push and pull
5. Perform repetitive movements
6. Perform complex sequences of hand eye coordination
7. Bend
8. Reach
9. Lift
10. Walk
11. Climb
12. Carry objects

Examples: The student can carry a twenty-pound case up a flight of stairs; give intramuscular injections; remove wound sutures.

SENSORY PERCEPTUAL

Ability to perceive with each of the following senses well enough to provide care and participate in educational activities:

1. Sight
2. Hearing
3. Touch

Examples: The student can accurately assess blood pressure and pulse; read the small print on medication packages and bottles; and assess client color.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Ability to function in the presence of each of the following commonly encountered and unavoidable environmental factors:

1. Noxious smells
2. Disease agents
3. Distractions
4. Noise
5. Chemicals
6. Unpredictable behavior in others

Examples: The student can recognize dangers in the client environment; tolerate disposing of body waste; and tolerate unpleasant odors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this document is to educate perspective applicants to the nursing program. Anyone who has concerns about whether or not they have the required skills and abilities for admission to or progression through a registered nurse education program should contact the university disability resource and /or the education program where they intend to apply. Perspective applicants should be able to disclose without discrimination and be given the opportunity to provide evidence supporting their ability to perform the RSAs in question to those responsible for admission to the program. The educational institution would then negotiate reasonable accommodation of their needs, such that they may be able to meet the requisite skills and abilities. Without appropriate disclosure and supporting documentation, the educational institution is not required to provide accommodation. Therefore it is imperative that a perspective student address the issue at the earliest opportunity. Accommodation should be a collaborative process in which all parties strive to meet their obligations and responsibilities in good faith.

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