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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.

Using this document

This document describes entry-level competencies and beyond entry-level competencies in relation to LPN practice. This document also describes the supports necessary so practical nurses can gain competency in a beyond entry-level skill. This document is specifically about LPN practice and does not address the practice expectations of RNs or NPs. Like all regulatory documents, use this document in conjunction with the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for LPNs.

Entry-level and beyond entry-level competencies

Entry-level competencies are those competencies expected of an entry-level licensed practical nurse in Nova Scotia. These competencies describe the knowledge, skills, and judgment required to provide safe and ethical nursing care in a variety of settings to clients of all age groups. They represent general practice, and as such, require no annual or regular recertification beyond initial education. Entry-level competencies are grouped according to context in the 2012 LPN Competency Profile.

Beyond entry-level competencies are advanced skills gained through additional education and/or clinical practice. LPNs must possess core entry-level knowledge before they can gain the specific knowledge to become competent in a beyond entry-level competency. These competencies represent a specific practice, and as such, employers may require regular recertification to document ongoing competence. Beyond entry-level competencies are those skills/interventions which are shaded in the 2012 LPN Competency Profile.

Achieving competency in a beyond entry-level competency

Competency in any beyond entry-level competency may be attained by successfully completing

• Employer based education, or
• A post-graduate course offered at a college or via a private educator. The community college may offer post-graduate education, however, in most cases, the employer can provide the necessary education to help LPNs gain the necessary competencies specific to their practice context.

Employer-based education framework to support beyond entry-level competencies

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Employers and nurses share accountability in the processes to attain and maintain competency.

Employers are accountable to ensure that practical nurses are provided with sufficient knowledge and resources to gain initial competence and sufficient opportunity maintain competence. Nurses are accountable to access employer-based education to gain initial competence, seek out opportunities to increase comfort and capacity, and negotiate with their employers if they require more or less support in the process.

There are three elements of the employer-based education framework to support beyond entry-level competencies and each must be sufficient to balance the needs of clients, nurses, and organizations.

1. Content

There must be sufficient content, theory, and technical components to provide the nurse with the necessary knowledge, skill, and judgment to enact a new competency. It is important to note that existing learning modules targeting RNs may need modification to ensure the necessary background information and content is appropriate and specific to LPN practice.
2. Clinical Learning Opportunity
A process must be in place to support the LPN to gain the necessary technical competency in the performance of a skill. The clinical learning opportunity provides the LPN a chance to apply the knowledge gained from the content. Clinical learning opportunities can be a variety of activities including preceptoring, mentorship, simulated demonstration or clinical shadowing.

3. Resources
There must be adequate resources (human, equipment, reference) in the practice environment to support the delivery of safe care by the LPN. An agency policy, describing and/or supporting the LPN practice in the competency is required.

Types of beyond entry-level competencies

There are two types of beyond entry-level competencies. The employer is accountable to determine the type of competency.

INFORMAL
These beyond entry-level competencies are generally new technical skills built on existing core PN knowledge and education. The educational and clinical opportunities necessary to support these competencies may be provided on-the-job by a mentor and are less structured. Documentation of achievement and maintenance of competency is generally not required unless otherwise determined by the employer.

FORMAL
These beyond entry-level competencies are new technical skills built on advanced or new PN knowledge and education. The educational and clinical opportunities necessary to support these competencies are more structured. Documentation of achievement and maintenance of competency may be required by the employer. Formal competencies are practice context dependent and may not transfer from existing employer to a new employer without the new employers’ approval.

Differentiated Practice

Beyond entry-level competencies are developed using the Scope of Practice for LPNs, pursuant to the Nursing Act (2019). Achieving competency in a beyond entry-level competency does not alter or expand the legislated scope of practice for the profession.

LPN practice is focused on recognition of the client baseline (which has been identified in the nursing component of the plan of care) and evaluation of the client response to the intervention to ensure that client responses are as expected. If, during or after the performance of any skill, intervention or competency, the practical nurse determines that client responses are unanticipated, new or not consistent with the expected outcomes of the plan of care, they are accountable to engage the appropriate health provider for consultation, direction or guidance.

The decisions or practice of LPNs varies in response to the findings of a client evaluation or assessment. Learning modules and clinical learning opportunities should clearly outline the practice accountabilities of the LPN when:

• outcomes are being achieved
• outcomes are not being achieved

References
