

The Parish Nurse as a Registered Nurse Review 2017

The requirement that the parish nurse be a registered nurse (RN) has been raised for discussion over the years. The need for this credential has been questioned by other health care providers in Canada such as the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and the Registered Practical Nurse (RPN). **The purpose of this review is to clarify research done on the LPN/RPN and will be referred to as RPN for the purposes of this report.**

This issue was brought forward to the board in 2016 and the board mandated an ad-hoc committee to research the current changes to the RPN entry level scope of practice. The committee met by phone and email several times from January- May 2017.

Research was gathered from the former Westberg Institute, The American Nurses Credentialing Centre, The College of Nurses of Ontario, and various articles from the UK. Information was gathered to determine best practice standards for credentialing Parish Nurses as well as entry- level scope of practice for newly registered RPN's. Their skill set and knowledge base has become more encompassing but the common thread throughout the research was the fact that the RPN does not practice in an independent role. The CNO document "RN and RPN Practice: The Client, the Nurse and the Environment, CNO 2014. Pub. No. 41062" states the following:

"Nurses can become experts in an area of practice within their own nursing category; however, enhanced competence through continuing education and experience does not mean that an RPN will acquire the same foundational competencies as an RN. This will only occur through the formal education and credentialing process.....

Nurses consult with one another when a situation demands nursing expertise that is beyond their competence. Consultation involves seeking advice or information from a more experienced or knowledgeable nurse or other health care professional. The practice setting influences the availability and accessibility of these consultation resources.

Whenever the need for consultation exceeds the efficient delivery of care, it is most likely that the client requires an RN to provide all care."

Consistently, CAPNM has reiterated the need for the parish nurse to be a registered nurse because of the scope of practice required to perform the role. The parish nurse must function as a nurse in independent practice due to the nature of the practice setting. In the faith community, the parish nurse works within an interdisciplinary ministry team in which she/he is the sole health care professional. Without the institutional infrastructure of a hospital or other health care facility, the parish nurse must be prepared to work autonomously with individuals whose conditions may be very complex and unpredictable.

For these reasons, it is affirmed, as per CAPNM's previous position statement, that the qualification of Registered Nurse remain as the minimum for a Parish Nurse. Although the scope of practice for RPN has expanded in recent years, independent practice is considered beyond this scope as the RPN must be able to consult with a Registered Nurse when needed.

CAPNM realizes the increased skill and knowledge level of the RPN and encourages parish nurses to involve them in their ministry in safe and creative ways. In collaboration with the parish nurse the RPN can assist by participating on the health team, BP clinics, coordinating health education sessions, and other skill sets that could be offered under the Parish Nurse Ministry.