Definition of Nephrology Nursing

Nephrology nursing is the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and well-being of individuals with kidney disease. This is achieved through the prevention and treatment of illness and injury, and alleviation of suffering through patient, family, and community advocacy.

Scope of Practice for Nephrology Nursing

The purpose of the Scope of Practice for Nephrology Nursing is to describe, for the public and the profession, the nature of this specialty’s nursing practice. The specialty's scope is derived from the scope of nursing practice as defined by the American Nurses Association (2009) and builds on the previous versions published by the American Nephrology Nurses’ Association (ANNA).

The recognition of kidney disease, acute and chronic, as a major health problem has led to the development of nephrology nursing as a specialty. The practice of nephrology nursing encompasses the roles of direct caregiver, educator, coordinator, consultant, administrator, and researcher; it extends to all care delivery settings in which patients experiencing or at risk for developing chronic kidney disease (CKD) stages 1 through 5, receive health care, education, and counseling for kidney disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Optimal individual and family functioning throughout all phases of disease management are the primary goals of nephrology nursing.

The nephrology nurse achieves these primary goals by diagnosing and treating human responses exhibited by individuals and families with kidney disease diagnoses or at risk for developing CKD. These human responses include, but are not limited to, physical symptoms, functional limitations, psychosocial disruptions, and knowledge needs. Treatment of these responses involves the delivery of replacement therapies including transplantation, restorative physical care to manage disease and treatment-related symptoms; health promotion and disease prevention counseling; health maintenance education; psychosocial support to build or sustain coping capacity; and education to encourage active participation in decision-making and self-care. The focus of the nephrology nurse is the patient, which can include individuals, families, groups, and communities.

Nephrology nursing practice occurs throughout the lifespan, along a continuum of care, and across delivery settings. Care requirements extend beyond kidney disease to address acute and/or chronic causative disease processes as well as subsequent co-morbid complications. The nature of this nursing care spans the spectrum from preventive and acute through replacement therapies and rehabilitation as well as palliative, supportive care as necessary. Nephrology nursing may be provided in a variety of settings: inpatient, outpatient, freestanding clinics, and home care.

Additionally, all nephrology nurses are legally, ethically, and morally responsible for practicing in accordance with recognized standards of professional nursing practice, professional performance, the recognized professional Code of Ethics, and specialty certification.
As illustrated in the above figure, this foundation for nephrology nursing underpins State Nurse Practice Acts and Institutional Policies and Procedures. The apex of this responsibility is achieved with the individual nephrology nurse’s assumption of personal accountability for continuing education and professional experience over and above the basic requirements for professional nephrology nursing.

**General Nephrology Nursing Practice**

In addition to basic educational preparation to function as a registered professional nurse, nephrology nursing practice at the generalist level requires a specific knowledge base and demonstrated clinical expertise in kidney disease care beyond that acquired in a basic nursing program.

The nephrology nurse functions as a coordinator of patient care collaborating with other care providers and health team members to provide required care as effectively as possible. The nephrology nurse acts as a patient guide and advocate, assisting the patient in seeking information, assuring that the patient has the opportunity for informed consent for treatment decisions, and promoting the maximal level of patient-desired independence. The nephrology nurse may also function as a nurse manager to assure the delivery of appropriate care.

The nephrology nurse is accountable for delivering care within the framework of the nursing process. The nephrology nurse uses assessment findings to formulate diagnoses and prioritize problems according to patient need. The nephrology nurse engages the patient in mutual goal setting and collaboration in developing a plan of care directed toward achieving identified goals. The effectiveness of the plan of care in goal achievement is evaluated through patient outcomes.

The nephrology nurse actively participates in professional role development activities including continuing education, quality assessment and improvement, and the review and clinical application of research findings to assure evidence-based practice. The nephrology nurse
develops ethically sound practice and confronts ethical challenges through application of the Standards of Nephrology Nursing Practice.

Advanced Nephrology Nursing Practice

Advanced nephrology nursing practice requires substantial theoretical knowledge in nephrology nursing and proficient use of that knowledge in providing expert care to individuals diagnosed with kidney disease and their families as well as the community at large. This advanced practice may include the roles of direct caregiver, coordinator, consultant, educator, researcher, and administrator. Consistent with the ANA Social Policy Statement and the Position on Advanced Clinical Nursing Practice issued by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, the basis for advanced nursing practice in nephrology requires a minimum of a master's degree. The Advanced Nurse Practitioner may be educationally prepared in primary care, geriatric, pediatric, adult or acute care.

Nephrology nurses practicing at the advanced level must be able to assess, conceptualize, diagnose, and analyze complex clinical and non-clinical problems related to the actual or potential diagnosis of kidney disease. In addition, advanced practice implies the ability to consider a wide range of theory and research relevant to understanding kidney disease related problems and the ability to select and justify the application of the most meaningful theory or research to assist in problem solving. The advanced practice nephrology nurse contributes knowledge of nephrology nursing research to interdisciplinary workgroups to assure an evidence base to guidelines that are incorporated into nephrology nursing practice.

Advanced nursing practice in nephrology is actualized through various roles. The role of the direct caregiver requires mastery of the nursing process and the ability to provide, guide, and evaluate nursing practice delivered to individuals diagnosed with kidney disease, their families, and the community. The coordinator role involves the expert use of the change process with the interdisciplinary nephrology care team to determine and achieve realistic health care goals for a particular individual, their family and/or for an entire community, while guiding the patient through the health care system.

The consultant role in advanced nephrology nursing practice involves providing expertise about nephrology to colleagues, allied health personnel, and all health care consumers. The educator role is exemplified by the expert design, implementation, and evaluation of education activities after the learning needs of the patient, family, or the community has been assessed. The role of the researcher at the advanced level requires at least beginning skills in the use of the research process, which includes the ability to identify current researchable problems in nephrology nursing, collaborate in research, and evaluate and implement research findings that affect patient care or nephrology nursing. The administrative role involves use of the managerial process to create a healthful practice environment conducive to the optimum health of the public and to professional nursing practice.

Advanced nephrology nursing practice is best defined as expert competency and leadership in the provision of care to individuals with an actual or potential diagnosis of kidney disease.

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