

Position Statement

“The Specialist Nurses in European Healthcare Towards 2030”

Todays landscape of health and Specialist Nurses

Never before has a profession in Europe¹ been as important as the evolution of the role of the Specialist Nurses². In ESNO we define the title ‘Specialist Nurse’ by including the other titles such as Advance Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Practitioner or otherwise referring to nurses with post bachelor or academic education background and nurses highly experienced in a certain health discipline.

This professional role serves the European citizen with the highest standard of care in hospitals, care institutions but above all everywhere in the community. A century ago, in the early developments of institutional health settings, nurses played a leading role in delivering healthcare to the sick and needy. However, over the past decades the responsibility of health was placed more and more in the hands of doctors, and so has become highly medicalised. Today, we are now seeing a transformation of healthcare towards a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach which has led to the nurse having a leading role in many clinical situations due their high levels of competency and knowledge.

In health setting today we see a growing expectation of clinical outcomes by the European citizen. This follows the Directives on the Cross Border Access for Health³ and the adoption of the Universal Health Coverage⁴ (UHC), and the outcome of the EU Health Summit – ‘A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF HEALTH IN EUROPE Paving the way in 2019 and beyond’⁵. This reflects the growing spectrum of challenges that the specialist nurses will encounter and be expected to deliver.

Evolution of the profession of Specialist Nurses

The Specialist Nurse’s profession has developed over the years and is based on general and fundamentals of treating patients from a standpoint of progressive educational development which enables the best possible care to be delivered. This has resulted in the Specialist Nurses profession being capable of providing the necessary standards to address such specialist areas as Intensive Care, Diabetes, Rheumatology, Oncology, Transplant, Renal and many other areas.

Specialist Nurses are now expected to perform duties in an independent way and to deliver treatment that they will be wholly accountable for under a clear and transparent regulatory framework.

The field of the Specialist Nurses also covers vital health threats such as Vaccination and Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR). In addition, this profession is addressing the increasing ageing population with the subsequent increase in comorbidity and polypharmacy. This places increased expectations on their expertise.

A unique feature of the nursing profession is the close relationship that they have with the patients that they serve. This enables the profession to be in the exclusive position understanding the treatment process and how this may be improved. This provides Specialist Nurses with the capability to input in a very meaningful way to improvements in the management and treatment of health

2-C. Dury, C. Hall, FHEA, J.L. Danan, J. Mondoux, M.C. Aguiar Barbieri-Figueiredo, M.A.M. Costa, C. Debout (2014) Specialist nurse in Europe: education, regulation and rôle, International nursing Review

³<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011L0024&from=EN>

⁴[https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc))

⁵<https://www.euhealthsummit.eu/wp-content/uploads/Future-of-Health-recommendations-in-full-new.pdf>

outcomes. Thus, adding greatly to evidence-based outcomes. This expertise can of course, be extended to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD), mental health, patient centred care, vulnerable groups, and transition between primary⁶, secondary and tertiary healthcare settings.

The challenge for Specialist Nurses in moving forward is to realise the benefits of moving away from a medical model of care provision towards adopting a holistic nursing approach in order to achieve the best patient outcomes. It is important to note a recent statement by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the evolving roles of the Specialist Nurse:

Many OECD countries have undergone reforms over the past decade to introduce advanced roles for nurses in primary care to improve access to care, quality of care and/or to reduce costs. This working paper provides an analysis of these nurse role developments and reforms in 37 OECD and EU countries. Four main trends emerge: 1) the development in several countries of specific advanced practice nursing roles at the interface between the traditional nursing and medical professions; 2) the introduction of various new, supplementary nursing roles, often focused on the management of chronic conditions; 3) the rise in educational programmes to train nurses to the required skills and competencies; and 4) the adoption of new laws and regulations in a number of countries since 2010 to allow certain categories of nurses to prescribe pharmaceuticals (including in Estonia, Finland, France, Netherlands, Poland and Spain).

Today's context of Specialist Nurses

In this context, the Specialist Nurse's role can be summarised in to seven key competences according ESNO CTF: Clinical roles; Patient Relation; Patient teaching and coaching; Mentoring; Research; Organisation and management; Ethic and decision making; Leadership and Policymaking; Prevention

In this evolution process in Europe and Global we see different definitions are accepted and covered by one main message : quality of health by advanced educated professional and European recognized standards education with the definitions below :

Royal College of Nurses (RCN) definition: Advanced practice is a level of practice, rather than a type of practice. Advanced Nurse Practitioners are educated at Masters Level in clinical practice and have been assessed as competent in practice using their expert clinical knowledge and skills. They have the freedom and authority to act, making autonomous decisions in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of patients. 'Advanced Practice Standards, RCN standards for advanced level nursing practice'⁷.

ESNO definition: The title Specialist Nurse is used and including the other titles such as Advance Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Practitioner or otherwise referring to nurses with post bachelor or academic education background and nurses highly experienced in a certain health discipline.

International Council of Nurses (ICN) definition: A Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nurse is a registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context and/or country in which s/he is credentialed to practice. A master's degree is recommended for entry level⁸

⁶<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/a8756593-en.pdf?expires=1555410406&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=40159D9DBD029F9A001390ADF518D559>

⁷ <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/advanced-practice-standards>

⁸ <http://international.aanp.org/practice/apnroles>

The position and standing of the medical profession (i.e. doctors) is well established and recognised across Europe. This is in direct contrast to the expertise and role of the Specialist Nurse in Europe. Over the past decades there has been a significant development in the field of the Specialist Nurses resulting in specialisations that are recognised as advanced to a high academic level of practice. There is also an expectancy that there will be an incremental increase in academic attainment, where by 2030 30-40% will be educated to Masters level. However these standards are not harmonised. For instance the position of the Specialist Nurse is legally recognised in certain EU national registration authorities but this is not universal across all of the European areas. In fact, there is often no regulation on a national level or even national regulations in place. Therefore, there is a real need to remove this fragmentation across the Europe. The objective must be to introduce an overall plan to build a robust framework to enable Specialist Nurses to be recognised across Europe. This will support the need to address the requirement for nursing quality assurance, capacity building, mobility⁹ and the alarming increasing on shortage of nurses.

We need to address this so that patient's needs are met, leading to safer patient care and positive economic benefits in a time when healthcare budgets are under great austerity measures.

Recommendation towards European recognition

The European Specialist Nurses Organization (ESNO) calls on national authorities to invest in a Specialist Nurses Health Workforce and implement cross border Regulatory Frameworks towards a legally embedded and harmonised position of the Specialist Nurses in each Member State. We maintain that a recognised European title for Specialist Nurses with clearly defined and harmonised roles and responsibilities to a prescribed standard is called for. This can easily be achieved through a European recognised advanced level of practice education programmes, including an ongoing accredited Continuing Professional Development programme (CPD)¹⁰ and using the by ESNO developed Common Training Framework 'Competences of the Specialist Nurse (NS): Common plinth of competences for a Common Training Framework of each specialty'¹¹.

The ESNO strongly believe in this approach which will undoubtedly produce a truly positive outcome and achieve a substantive, stable and established nurses' health-workforce. This will mean that the Specialist Nurses vital role can be truly recognised and so establish a leading position within healthcare that can adapt to the changing needs of healthcare now and in the future. This will deliver patient care to the highest level and contribute to the evolution of evidence-based practice with the subsequent economic and health benefits to society.

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⁹ http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/152324/Health-Professional-Mobility-Health-Systems.pdf

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/lifelong-learning-open-learning-opportunities_en.htm

¹¹ http://www.esno.org/assets/esno-common_training_framework_27-10-2015.pdf

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organizations.

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