

Becoming a Licensed
Practical Nurse in Canada
Requisite Skills and Abilities

Foreword

The Canadian Council for Practical Nurse Regulators (CCPNR) is a federation of provincial and territorial members who are identified in legislation, and responsible for the safety of the public through the regulation of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs).

The Council of the CCPNR recognized the need to develop the requisite skills and abilities for individuals to use to determine their ability to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care, and meet the demands for a career as a LPN in Canada. A steering committee from the representatives of all jurisdictions who license and/or regulate LPNs across Canada (with the exception of Quebec) was identified to guide and advise the project. Assessment Strategies Inc. was commissioned to research and develop the requisite skills and abilities in collaboration with the steering committee. This document was validated by the LPN community and key stakeholder groups across Canada and was approved by the Boards of the respective regulatory authorities of the CCPNR's Board members.

This document is designed to identify the desired and achievable level of requisite skills and abilities expected of LPNs and can provide direction in the development of policies and procedures in the practice environment. The CCPNR thanks all participants who contributed to the creation of this document and acknowledges the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of British Columbia for the consultative use of their finalized or draft versions of their requisite skills and abilities documents in the creation of this document.

The CCPNR approves and adopts the requisite skills and abilities for the LPN outlined in this document.

For the purposes of this document, the term “licensed practical nurse” also refers to “registered practical nurse.”

This document is only applicable in Canadian provinces or territories that have adopted or enacted these requisite skills and abilities as regulatory requirements for practical nursing in that jurisdiction in accordance and consistent with applicable law for that jurisdiction.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Available in French under the title:

Devenir infirmier ou infirmière auxiliaire autorisé(e) au Canada - Compétences et aptitudes.

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Preamble

The information in this document may be used by individuals to determine their ability to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care, and meet the demands for a career as a licensed practical nurse in Canada.

Canadians expect their health-care system to provide them with safe care and to support them in becoming as healthy as possible. Meeting this expectation requires that licensed practical nurses are educated and capable of providing safe, competent and ethical nursing care. They must demonstrate the capacity to meet jurisdictional entry-to-practice competencies, and be able to practise within the context of relevant legislation and regulation while adhering to professional standards of practice and codes of ethics for the profession. Through legislation, the practical nursing profession is also granted the authority to recognize and set standards of education and standards of practice for the profession with an obligation to protect and serve the public interest.

The practice of licensed practical nurses spans a continuum from novice to expert and may encompass clinical practice, administration, education, research, consultation, management, regulation, policy and system development.

Practical nursing is a profession that is practiced 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Individuals must have the ability to work various day/evening/night shift rotations, sometimes in excess of 12 continuous hours. Shifts occur on weekdays, weekends and holidays.

Through their basic (entry-level) recognized education programs, experience and continuing education activities, licensed practical nurses gain the theoretical and practical foundation to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care. Licensed practical nurses care for people of all ages, regardless of gender, ethnicity or social situation, in a variety of practice settings (e.g., hospitals, communities, homes, clinics, schools and residential facilities). Their practice requires knowledge about health and illness, human biological sciences, the pathophysiology of diseases, health promotion and prevention, teaching and learning, and health-care systems.

Licensed practical nurses have a duty to provide safe and appropriate nursing care and to practise collaboratively with other members of the health-care team. They practise autonomously within their own level of competence and seek guidance from other health-care professionals when aspects of the care required are beyond their individual competence. The psychosocial components of care, including interpersonal, communication and teamwork skills, are fundamental to safe and effective practice.

Regulatory Requirements

Individuals who decide to pursue a career as a licensed practical nurse must meet certain formal requirements for registration with the professional regulatory authority, including:

- successfully meeting the regulatory authority's education and language requirements;
- demonstrating that they meet the entry-to-practice competencies;
- passing the Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Examination (CPNRE);
- demonstrating evidence of good character, including demonstrating that they possess the moral and ethical judgment expected of a licensed practical nurse;
- demonstrating the fitness to practice as a licensed practical nurse;
- demonstrating the cognitive, behavioural, communication, interpersonal and physical skills and abilities to engage in the practice of a licensed practical nurse; and,
- submitting a satisfactory criminal record review.

Individuals with additional questions regarding these requirements should contact the education program they wish to attend or the regulatory authority in the province/territory in which they wish to practise.

Certain basic skills and abilities are required to practise as a licensed practical nurse in Canada. The requisite skills and abilities provide the public and practitioners with information about the nature of the activities that licensed practical nurses must be able to perform, and the general demands of practical nursing education and practice.

The requisite skills and abilities identified below are essential. They are organized into seven categories using examples of entry-level practical nursing activities to illustrate the particular requirement. The list provides a snapshot of the nature and types of activities involved in typical entry-level licensed practical nurse practice, but should not be considered exhaustive.

Cognitive

Ability to perform skills which demonstrate thinking capacity:

- Remember information;
- Able to focus on and manage multiple pieces of information at the same time;
- Able to problem solve, reason, make decisions and use critical thinking to develop professional judgment; and,
- Apply mathematical skills and abilities in order to:
 - Add, subtract, multiply and divide; and,
 - Calculate ratios and percentages, and apply algebraic equations.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can recall clinical skills or patterns of signs and symptoms and diagnoses from previous interactions, use past experiences to inform current decisions; perceive when situations require further inquiry; and recall written, oral or audio-taped information.

Communication

Ability to express and receive written, verbal and non-verbal language, and the ability to interact with others in a respectful and professional manner:

- Speak, write, read and comprehend English and/or French adequately to effectively communicate in a clear and concise manner;
- Recognize their own non-verbal signals and interpret those received from others while considering individual differences in expression and associated meaning; and,
- Communicate information through documentation in client charts, both paper and electronic.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can obtain and attend to information while taking a health history; and communicate well with other health-care team members.

Interpersonal

Ability to create positive relationships:

- Develop relationships and rapport with individuals and groups;
- Respond to the needs of clients and colleagues;
- Understand the differences between professional therapeutic relationships and personal friendships;
- Work in close proximity to clients and colleagues; and,
- Understand that the LPN is providing care to a full range of individuals.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can support a client during a painful procedure and identify that others have needs and perspectives that might differ.

Behavioural

Ability to conduct oneself in a professional manner:

- Manage own behaviour to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care;
- Admit to making mistakes;
- Engage in self-reflection;
- Take initiative to collaborate with others to create a safe environment;
- Respond appropriately in situations that are stressful or that involve conflict;
- React appropriately to giving and receiving physical touch;
- Fulfill responsibilities as part of a team; and,
- Set priorities and organize actions in an environment with multiple demands.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can manage time appropriately. The licensed practical nurse maintains a calm presence with clients, regardless of client behaviour.

Sensory Perceptual

Ability to accurately perceive with each of the following senses to provide safe care and actively participate in nursing activities:

- Sight;
- Hearing;
- Smell; and,
- Touch.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can read numbers and lines of demarcation on a syringe; feel a client's pulse; and hear a client's breath sounds.

Physical

Ability to perform and have control over each of the following actions to provide safe client care and to actively participate in educational activities:

- Stand and maintain balance;
- Possess manual dexterity;
- Move within limited spaces;
- Push and pull;
- Perform repetitive movements;
- Perform complex sequences of hand-eye coordination;
- Bend;
- Reach;
- Lift;
- Walk;
- Climb; and,
- Carry objects.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can change a sterile dressing on a wound, prepare and administer medications by injection, assist an adult client to get out of bed and walk, perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and climb stairs for a home care visit while carrying supplies that may weigh in excess of 8 kg.

Environmental

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

- Distractions;
- Unpredictable behaviour of others;
- Noxious odours;
- Disease agents;
- Noise; and,
- Chemicals.

Example: The licensed practical nurse can tolerate and assess the odour of infections, urine, feces, sputum, blood and emesis.

Anyone who has questions about whether or not they have the required skills and abilities for admission to or progression through a recognized practical nursing education program, or entry into the licensed practical nurse profession should contact the education program to which they intend to apply or the regulatory authority in the province/territory in which they wish to practice.

Human Rights Considerations

Human Rights legislation prohibits discrimination on a number of characteristics, including physical and mental disabilities. 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, as may be applicable, provincial or territorial human rights legislation of the Canadian Human Rights Act³. Reference would need to be made to the human rights legislation and law applicable to a particular province or territory to determine if and to what extent principles of accommodation may apply to occupational standards for the practice of a licensed practical nurse.

³ The purpose of this Act is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect, within the purview of matters coming within the legislative authority of Parliament, to the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted. (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1987 R.S., 1985, c. H-6, s. 2; 1996, c. 14, s. 1; 1998, c. 9, s. 9.)

Glossary

Below are the terms and definitions as they are used in this document.

Client

Refers to individuals (or their designated representatives), families and groups.

Clinical judgment

Processes that rely on critical inquiry to reflect the complex, intuitive and conscious thinking strategies that guide nursing decisions.

Competence

The quality or ability of a practical nurse to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgments and personal attributes required to practise safely and ethically in a designated role and setting. Personal attributes include, but are not limited to, attitudes, values and beliefs.

Competencies

The integrated knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes, critical thinking and clinical judgment expected of an entry-level licensed practical nurse to provide safe, competent and ethical care.

Competent

Having or demonstrating the necessary knowledge, skills and judgments required to practise safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.

Continuing Competence

The ongoing ability to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills and judgement required to practise safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.

Critical inquiry

This term expands on the meaning of critical thinking to encompass critical reflection on actions. Critical inquiry refers to a process of purposive thinking and reflective reasoning whereby practitioners examine ideas, assumptions, principles, conclusions, beliefs and actions in the context of nursing practice. The critical inquiry process is associated with a spirit of inquiry, discernment, logical reasoning and application of standards. (Brunt, 2005; Jurisdictional Collaborative Process, 2006)

Critical thinking

An active and purposeful problem-solving process. It requires the practical nurse to advance beyond the performance of skills and interventions to provide the best possible care, based on evidence-informed practice. It involves identifying and prioritizing risks and problems, clarifying and challenging assumptions, using an organized approach to assessment, checking for accuracy and reliability of information, weighing evidence, recognizing inconsistencies, evaluating conclusions and adapting thinking.

Entry-level practitioner

The licensed practical nurse at the point of licensure, following graduation from an approved practical nursing program or equivalent.

Evidence-informed practice

The identification, evaluation and application of nursing experience and current research to guide practice decisions.

Fitness to practise

The qualities and capabilities of licensed practical nurses relevant to their capacity to practise. This includes, but is not limited to, freedom from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional conditions, or a dependence on alcohol or drugs that impairs their ability to practise nursing.

Health

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It includes physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, psychological and social health.

Health-care team

Clients, families, health-care professionals, unregulated health workers, students, volunteers, educators, spiritual leaders and others who may be involved in providing care.

Health promotion

The process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health based on an understanding of the determinants of health. Health promotion is particularly concerned with values and vision of a preferred future.

Legislated scope of practice

Determined through provincial legislation set in individual jurisdictions.

Professional regulatory authorities

Canadian provincial and territorial professional bodies responsible for the regulation of licensed practical nurses.

Recognized education program

An education program recognized by the regulatory authorities in Canada as meeting their education requirements for licensed practical nurses.

Research

Systematic inquiry that uses orderly scientific methods and/or the nursing process to answer questions or solve problems.

Safety

The reduction or mitigation of unsafe acts within the health-care team and health-care system.

Scope of practice

The parameters that outline the roles and responsibilities of the licensed practical nurse as defined by legislation and the regulatory authorities.

Standards of practice

Minimum expected levels of practitioner behaviour, against which actual practitioner behaviour is measured.

Unregulated health worker

A health-care worker, who is not part of a regulated health profession, who provides care to persons under the guidance of a regulated health professional.

References

The following competency requisite skills and abilities documents were consulted during the development of this document.

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