

Update of Licensed Practical Nurse Competencies in Alberta

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The demand for quality, cost-effective nursing care grew in Alberta, Canada, between 2005 and 2015. To meet this demand, the scope and role of Alberta's licensed practical nurses (LPNs) was expanded. In 2014, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, or CLPNA, began reviewing and updating the province's *Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses*. In June 2015, the CLPNA released an updated third edition of the profile, which identifies base competencies for entry to practice, serves as a tool for LPNs interested in enriching their primary area of responsibility, provides a framework for education programs regarding curriculum components, and guides employers' understandings of LPN practice across all care settings. This article describes the development of the competency profile in 1998, the need for updates in 2005, and the most recent process to update the 2015 edition of the competency profile. The revised edition demonstrates the process that included community engagement, knowledge translation, implementation, and evaluation, and discusses how the profile will be continuously evaluated to facilitate future updates.

Keywords: Continued competence, licensed practical nurses (LPNs), LPN competencies, scope of practice

In Canada, the provision of health care is decentralized, resulting in varying roles and scopes of practice for health care professionals based on individual provincial legislation and regulations. Despite the lack of standardization, national collaboration exists among regulating bodies. The Canadian Council for Practical Nurse Regulators (CCPNR) sets national-level (with the exception of Quebec) standards of practice (2013a), code of ethics (2013b), entry-to-practice competencies (2013c), and requisite skills and abilities (2013d) that guide the development of the standardized Canadian practical nurse examination. The scopes of LPNs and registered nurses (RNs) often overlap in terms of practice activities and care duties. All RNs in Canada, except those residing in Quebec, are required to hold a baccalaureate degree in nursing for entry to practice. The RN role has therefore expanded, with more and more RNs working in management and administrative roles within the health system.

In Alberta, the LPN is a professional autonomous nurse involved in the assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation of nursing care. LPNs provide health care services in direct clinical care as well as in education, research, and administration. Since 1947, the LPN role has evolved significantly to meet the changing health needs of Albertans. LPNs require a diploma-level education (2-year program) for entry to practice. In addition, under the self-regulating framework created by Alberta's Health Professions Act (HPA, 2000), participation in a continued competency program (CCP) is mandatory. The CCP is designed to support life-long learning and expand LPN knowledge, observable

behaviors, and performance of skills to practice safe competent and ethical care.

LPNs' scope of practice is directed by a framework that includes the HPA (2000), *Licensed Practical Nurses Profession Regulation* (Government of Alberta, 2003), and the third edition of *Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta* (College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta [CLPNA], 2015). The framework defines the LPN scope of practice from novice to expert practitioner. LPNs must work within this framework as well as their defined job description and employer policy.

Alberta's Need for Revision

In the fall of 2014, the CLPNA, which regulates over 15,000 LPNs, recognized the need to revise the province's document, *Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta* (CLPNA, 2015). The competency profile outlines the legislated scope of practice for LPNs in Alberta, recognizing that each LPN has a set of competencies specific to their individual knowledge, experience, practice, and workplace setting. No one LPN is required to possess all competencies described in the profile, and the degree of proficiency in each competency will vary on an individual basis. The profile broadly defines the scope of practice of LPNs in Alberta and provides a foundation for the CLPNA's CCP by providing a reference for LPN ongoing assessment of individual competency. Table 1 provides a list of the competency bands encompassed within the profile. The full 262-page competency profile is available at

TABLE 1

Alberta's Licensed Practical Nurses Competency Bands

A	Nursing Knowledge
B	Nursing Process
C	Safety
D	Communication and Interpersonal Skills
E	Nursing Practice*
F	Respiratory Care
G	Surgical
H	Orthopedics
I	Neurological/Neurosurgical
J	Cardiovascular
K	Maternal/Newborn Care
L	Pediatrics
M	Mental Health and Addiction
N	Emergency Care
O	Gerontology
P	Palliative Care
Q	Rehabilitation
R	Community Health
S	Oncology
T	Occupational Health and Safety
U	Medication Administration
V	Infusion Therapy
W	Professionalism
X	Leadership
Y	Orthopedic Specialty
Z	Perioperative Specialty
AA	Dialysis Specialty
BB	Independent Practice
CC	Advanced Foot Care
DD	Dermatology
EE	Educator
FF	Ophthalmology
GG	Immunization Specialty

*Updated January 31, 2017.

<http://www.clpna.com/members/continuing-competency-program/competency-profile-for-lpns/>. Initially developed and released in 1998, the competency profile was revised in 2003 after the proclamation of the profession under the Alberta HPA (2000). The HPA is the provincial legislation that delegates the responsibility of regulation to professional bodies called *colleges*. Under the HPA, each profession has a practice statement that serves to guide the regulations and scopes of practice. In 2005, the CLPNA changed the educational requirements for licensure from a 52-week certificate program to a 68-week diploma program. As a result, LPN

competency and scope of practice grew rapidly during the next 9 years, and the CLPNA began a review and update the process. These updates resulted in a third edition of the competency profile being published in 2015.

The updated competency profile marks a maturing of the LPN profession in Alberta. LPNs work in all sectors of the health workforce, from clinical settings to leadership and management roles to independent practice. The updated competency profile provides flexibility for the continued growth of the LPN role well into the future. The revised profile does the following:

- Includes the knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and judgments required of an LPN in Alberta as defined in the HPA (2000), the LPN profession regulation (Government of Alberta, 2003), and the *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada* (CCPNR, 2013a)
- Broadly defines the scope of practice of LPNs in Alberta and provides a foundation for the CLPNA's CCP, a legislated requirement under the HPA (2000)
- Identifies base competencies for entry to practice and serves as a tool for LPNs interested in changing or advancing within their primary areas of responsibility or scope of practice
- Provides a framework for practical nurse (PN) education program providers regarding essential curriculum components and guides employers in understanding the full scope of practice for role optimization of LPNs in care settings
- Provides a benchmark for performance management and review, although the profile does not include all potential competencies required of LPNs (CLPNA, 2015).

This article describes the initial development of the CLPNA's LPN competency profile; demonstrates the process that included community engagement, knowledge translation, implementation, and evaluation; and discusses how the profile will be continuously evaluated to facilitate future updates.

LPN Competency

In Alberta, LPNs work closely with individuals, families, and groups, assessing their needs and providing care and treatment as appropriate. Using assessment and critical thinking skills, LPNs formulate nursing diagnoses, plan interventions, provide health education, and evaluate responses to treatment in collaboration with patients and other regulated and nonregulated health providers. LPNs work independently and interdependently as members of collaborative health care teams. The level of independence for the LPN depends on several factors, including patient needs, complexity and predictability, competencies of the individual LPN and other health professionals on the team, and environmental supports. Employer policy, job description, and the extent to which employers use LPNs at their full scope influence the LPN role in each practice setting. Competency is defined as the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes of a professional nurse. No LPN is required to possess and maintain all competencies of the profes-

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