

Professional Competence in Nursing Practice

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

1. recognize nurse's role in professional competence
2. distinguish the attributes of competent nurse

The registered nurse is individually responsible and accountable for maintaining professional competence.

It is the nursing profession's responsibility to shape and guide any process for assuring nurse competence.

The employer is responsible and accountable to provide a practice environment conducive to competent practice.

Assurance of competence is the shared responsibility of the profession, individual nurses, professional organizations, credentialing and certification entities, regulatory agencies, employers, and other key stakeholders.

ANA believes that in the practice of nursing, competence can be defined, measured, and evaluated. No single evaluation method or tool can guarantee competence. Competence is situational and dynamic; it is both an outcome and an ongoing process.

An individual who demonstrates competence is performing at an expected level.

- A *competency* is an expected level of performance that integrates knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment.

- The integration of knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment occurs in formal, informal, and reflective learning experiences.
- Knowledge encompasses thinking, understanding of science and humanities, professional standards of practice, and insights gained from context, practical experiences, personal capabilities, and leadership performance.
- Skills include psychomotor, communication, interpersonal, and diagnostic skills.
- Ability is the capacity to act effectively. It requires listening, integrity, knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses, positive self-regard, emotional intelligence, and openness to feedback.
- Judgment includes critical thinking, problem solving, ethical reasoning, and decision-making.

When describing the types of learning associated with development of a competency, formal learning most often occurs in structured, academic, and professional development practice environments, while informal learning can be described as experiential insights gained in work, community, home, and other settings. The recurrent, thoughtful, personal self-assessment, analysis, and synthesis of strengths and opportunities for improvement constitute reflective learning.

Evaluating Competence

Competence in nursing practice can be evaluated by the individual nurse (self-assessment), nurse peers, and nurses in the roles of supervisor, coach, mentor, or preceptor. In addition, other aspects of nursing performance may be evaluated by professional colleagues and healthcare consumers.