



**Scope and Standards
of Practice for
The Acute Care
Nurse Practitioner**



American Association
of Critical-Care Nurses

AMERICAN
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STANDARDS OF CLINICAL PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

The standards of clinical practice are intended to be used in conjunction with the *Scope of Practice* section, which addresses the role and scope of practice for the ACNP. These standards apply to the care that the ACNP provides for all patients.

The professional practice of the ACNP is characterized by the application of relevant theories, research, and evidence-based guidelines to explain human behavior and related phenomena. This also provides a basis for advanced nursing intervention and evaluation of patient-oriented health outcomes.

The ACNP's critical thinking and selective use of theoretical knowledge and research provide for the comprehensive assessment and accurate diagnosis of the patient's responses to actual or potential health problems. Theory and research also guide the ACNP's analysis of data, intervention choices, methods of implementation, and evaluation of patient outcomes. To sustain and build on research and evidence-based practice, it is recognized that ACNPs require resource materials in their practice settings, support for and access to continuing education programs, and a philosophy that is congruent with research and evidence-based nursing actions.^{1, pgs 17,18}

STANDARDS OF CARE

The standards of care for the ACNP build upon the generalist standards of care in *Nursing's Scope & Standards of Practice*² and the *Standards for Acute and Critical Care Nursing Practice*.³ The nursing process is used as the framework, including assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The standards of care also incorporate competencies specific to ACNP practice. The focus of the ACNPs practice is restorative, curative, rehabilitative, maintainable, or palliative care, based on identified patient need.

Standard I. Assessment

The acute care nurse practitioner collects data for acute, critical and complex chronically ill patients.

Rationale

The ACNP generates, collects, and integrates data from a wide variety of sources in order to make clinical judgments and decisions about appropriate orders, procedures, and treatments.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Independently performs and documents a complete history and physical examination for acute, critical, and complex chronically ill patients.
2. Prioritizes data collection according to the patient's immediate condition, needs, and developmental level.
3. Collects data in a continuous process in recognition of the dynamic nature of acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
4. Collects data using appropriate assessment techniques, relevant supporting diagnostic information and diagnostic procedures when indicated.
5. Utilizes physiologically and technologically derived data to determine patients' needs or conditions.
6. Distinguishes between normal and abnormal developmental and age-related physiologic and behavioral changes in acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
7. Assesses for interactive and synergistic effects of multiple pharmacological and nonpharmacologic interventions.
8. Promotes and protects health by assessing for risks associated with care of acute, critical, and complex chronically ill patients, such as:
 - a. Physiologic risk: medication side-effects, immobility, impaired nutrition, immunocompetence, fluid and electrolyte imbalance, invasive interventions, therapeutic modalities and diagnostic tests.
 - b. Psychological risks: impaired sleep and communication, crisis related to threat of life, self-image, finances, medication side-effects, home and educational environment, and altered family dynamics.
 - c. Healthcare system risks associated with care of complex patients: including but not limited to, multiple caregivers, polypharmacy, and discoordination of care continuity, care planning, or communication with family or between multiple care providers.
9. Assesses the needs of families and caregivers of acute, critical and complex chronically-ill patients.
10. Integrates data from all available resources to ensure that the pertinent database is complete.

11. Synthesizes, prioritizes, and documents the database in a form that:
 - a. is confidential, understandable, and retrievable by all members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team,
 - b. minimizes the potential for error, and
 - c. establishes accountability for the provision of professional services.

Standard II. Diagnosis

The acute care nurse practitioner analyzes the assessment data in determining diagnoses for the patient with acute, critical and complex chronic illness.

Rationale

The ACNP diagnoses and prioritizes actual or potential healthcare problems as the basis for designing interventions for the restoration of health or to meet a patient's goals.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Formulates the differential and working diagnosis through the analysis and synthesis of data from a variety of sources, using critical thinking and diagnostic reasoning skills, previous experiences, and best practices.
2. Formulates diagnoses that encompass both nursing and medical problems.
3. Orders, performs, interprets, and supervises diagnostic tests and procedures that contribute to the formulation of the differential diagnoses, working diagnoses and subsequent plan of care.
4. Prioritizes diagnoses based on the interpretation of available data and the complexity and severity of the patients condition.
5. Collaborates and consults with the interdisciplinary healthcare team, the patient and family when developing differential diagnoses, working diagnoses, and prioritizing problems.
6. Revises and reprioritizes diagnoses based on new and ongoing patient data and the patient's dynamic clinical status.
7. Diagnoses complications of acute, critical, and complex chronic illness considering multisystem health problems.
8. Individualizes the diagnostic process based on the uniqueness of the patient including the patient's individuality, cultural differences, spiritual beliefs, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, age, use of alternative medicine, and family configuration.

Standard III. Outcome Identification

The acute care nurse practitioner identifies expected outcomes individualized for the patient with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.

Rationale

The ACNP assumes a leadership role in assuring that the patient and healthcare team identify expected outcomes of care as the basis for developing the interdisciplinary plan of care.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Derives expected outcomes from the diagnosis.
2. Identifies expected outcomes that incorporate scientific evidence and are achievable through implementation of evidence-based practices.
3. Identifies expected outcomes that are consistent with the patient's present and potential capabilities, as well as his or her values, culture and environment.
4. Identifies expected outcomes mutually with the patient, family and other healthcare providers.
5. Identifies expected outcomes taking into account the benefits and costs for the patient, family, institution and society.
6. Establishes intermediate goals that reflect measurable incremental indicators of progress in achieving expected outcomes.
7. Modifies expected outcomes based upon changes in the patient's condition or wishes.
8. Promotes optimal outcomes by minimizing risk and promoting and protecting the health of patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
9. Collaborates with the patient family, and the interdisciplinary team in establishing desired restorative, curative, rehabilitative, maintenance, palliative and end-of-life care outcomes.

Standard IV. Planning

The acute care nurse practitioner develops a plan of care that prescribes interventions to attain expected outcomes for the patient with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.

Rationale

The plan of care is of sufficient breadth and depth to guide the interdisciplinary team in achieving the desired health outcomes for patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic healthcare needs and prescribes interventions to attain the agreed upon endpoints.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP formulates a plan of care that:

1. Is individualized, dynamic, and can be applied across the continuum of acute care services.
2. Integrates knowledge of rapidly changing pathophysiology of acute and critical illness.
3. Incorporates input from the interdisciplinary team.
4. Prescribes the diagnostic strategies and therapeutic interventions (both pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic) needed to achieve expected outcomes.
5. Utilizes evidence-based practice.
6. Incorporates health promotion, health protection, and injury prevention measures that are specific to acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
7. Facilitates the patient's transition between and within healthcare settings (admitting, transferring, and discharging).
8. Incorporates mutually agreed upon plans for restorative, curative, rehabilitative, and maintenance healthcare, as well as palliative and end-of-life care when appropriate.
9. Develops the plan to reflect the actual and anticipated needs of the patient and family, and includes their values and beliefs regarding nursing and medical therapies.
10. Incorporates considerations of cost and quality benefits in planning care.
11. Provides patients with information about intended effects and potential adverse effects of proposed prescriptive therapies.
12. Documents the plan of care in a manner that is confidential, understandable, and retrievable by all members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team, to minimize the potential for error.

Standard V. Implementation

The acute care nurse practitioner implements the interventions identified in the interdisciplinary plan of care for the patient with acute, critical and complex chronic illness.

Rationale

The ACNP has the authority and is accountable for planning, implementing, or delegating therapeutic interventions delineated in the interdisciplinary plan of care.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Prescribes interventions consistent with the established interdisciplinary plan of care.

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2. Prescribes and performs diagnostic, pharmacologic and therapeutic interventions consistent with the practitioner's education, practice and state regulatory requirements.
3. Performs and delegates interventions in a safe, appropriate, and ethical manner.
4. Collaborates with the interdisciplinary healthcare team to implement the plan of care.
5. Implements interventions to support the patient with a rapidly deteriorating physiologic condition, including the application of basic and advanced life support and other invasive interventions or procedures to regain physiologic stability.
6. Documents interventions in a manner that:
 - a. is confidential, understandable, and retrievable by all members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team.
 - b. minimizes the potential for error.
 - c. establishes accountability for the provision of professional services.

Standard VI. Evaluation

The ACNP evaluates the patient's progress toward attainment of expected outcomes.

Rationale

Through continuous evaluation of the patient's changing condition and response to therapeutic interventions, the ACNP modifies the plan of care to optimize patient outcomes.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Performs a systemic and ongoing evaluation of each patient in order to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the interventions.
2. Incorporates the use of quality indicators, scientific evidence, and the risk/benefit analysis of the treatment process when evaluating the patient's progress toward expected outcomes.
3. Utilizes interdisciplinary collaboration and multiple data resources as appropriate.
4. Modifies the plan of care based upon evaluation of outcomes.
5. Documents the evaluation process, and provides the results to appropriate healthcare professionals.
6. Consults and makes appropriate referrals as needed, based on the evaluation process.

REFERENCES

1. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and American Nurses Association. *Standards of Clinical Practice and Scope of Practice for the Acute Care Nurse Practitioner*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Publishing; 1995.
2. American Nurses Association. *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Association; 2004.
3. Medina J, ed. *Standards for Acute and Critical Care Nursing Practice*. Aliso Viejo, Calif: American Association of Critical-Care Nurses; 2000.

STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

Standards of professional performance describe a competent level of behavior in the professional role, including activities related to quality of professional practice, education, collaboration, ethics, systems management, resource utilization, leadership, collegiality, quality of practice, and research. Although the Standards of Professional Performance describe the roles of all ACNPs, there are many other responsibilities that are hallmarks of advanced nursing practice. ACNPs should be self-directed and purposeful in seeking the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance career goals. Membership in professional organizations, certification, continuing education, and advanced degrees are desirable methods of enhancing the ACNP's professionalism.

STANDARD I. Professional Practice

The acute care nurse practitioner evaluates his or her clinical practice in relation to institutional guidelines, professional practice standards, and relevant statutes and regulations.

Rationale

The ACNP is accountable to the public for providing competent clinical care to patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness, and has the professional responsibility to evaluate role performance according to professional practice standards, relevant statutes and regulations, and institutional guidelines.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Engages regularly in self-evaluation of practice.
2. Collects and analyzes data regarding performance of procedures, delivery of care, the incidence and types of individual care complications, and the resulting effect on patients, in order to evaluate and improve practice.

3. Utilizes patient outcome measures as a component of individual performance appraisal.
4. Participates in and evaluates or improves structures for peer review to foster a culture of clinical and professional excellence.

STANDARD II. Education

The acute care practitioner acquires and maintains current knowledge in advanced nursing practice.

Rationale

The ACNP is accountable for maintaining current knowledge and skills in order to facilitate a high quality of clinical performance and promote professional growth.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Is accountable for self-engagement in educational activities related to the clinical care of acute, critical, and complex chronically ill individuals, and professional practice.
2. Utilizes information gained in educational activities to improve professional performance.
3. Maintains professional records that provide evidence of competency and lifelong learning to patients, employers, and professional and regulatory entities.
4. Utilizes current healthcare research findings and other evidence to expand clinical knowledge related to acute, critical, and complex chronic illness, enhance role performance, and increase knowledge of professional issues.
5. Develops educational interventions appropriate to the acute, critical, and complex chronically ill patient's needs, values and cognitive level using input from the patient, family, and caregiver.

STANDARD III. Collaboration

The acute care nurse practitioner collaborates with the patient, family, and other healthcare providers in patient care.

Rationale

Delivery of acute care services requires a coordinated, ongoing interaction between consumers and providers. The ACNP models behaviors that facilitate a collaborative process within the interdisciplinary healthcare team.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Consults and collaborates with the patient, family, and other healthcare providers to provide coordinated, interdisciplinary care.

2. Collaborates with other disciplines in teaching, consultation, management, technological development, research, and other professional activities.
3. Initiates referrals and performs consultations to facilitate optimal care.
4. Initiates and promotes collaboration among other members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team to facilitate optimal care for acute, critical, and complex chronically ill patients.
5. Documents plan of care communications, rationales for plan of care changes, and collaborative discussions to improve coordination of patient care.
6. Teaches, coaches, and supports nurses and other healthcare professionals to advance the plan of care for acute, critical, and complex chronically ill patients.

STANDARD IV. Ethics

The acute care nurse practitioner integrates ethical considerations into all areas of practice.

Rationale

The ACNP has an obligation to ensure that care provided is congruent with patient needs, values, and the *Code for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*³ and the AACN *Ethic of Care*.²

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Contributes to the establishment of an ethical environment that supports the rights of patients and other care professionals.
2. Contributes to individual and system responses in the resolution of ethical dilemmas.
3. Serves as a mentor or role model for resolution of clinical or ethical dilemmas.
4. Informs the patient of the risks, benefits, and outcomes of healthcare regimens.
5. Participates in interdisciplinary teams addressing ethical risks, benefits, and outcomes.
6. Advocates for the patient's access to healthcare resources within systems and communities.

STANDARD V. Systems Management

The acute care nurse practitioner develops and participates in organizational systems and processes promoting optimal patient outcomes.

Rationale

The ACNP provides leadership in the delivery of care within and across the systems that comprise the continuum of acute care services.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Applies knowledge of organizational theories and systems to improve health-care.
2. Serves as a resource in the design and development of care programs and initiatives across the continuum of acute care services.
3. Demonstrates knowledge of governmental and regulatory constraints or opportunities that affect the system of care delivery.
4. Analyzes organizational system enhancements and barriers that affect patient care.
5. Advocates for and participates in the removal of organizational system barriers to optimal patient care and participates in enhancing that care.
6. Evaluates the ongoing integration of practice standards into systems of health-care delivery.
7. Facilitates and participates in coordination of services across the acute care delivery system for individuals and groups.

STANDARD VI. Resource Utilization

The acute care nurse practitioner considers factors related to safety, effectiveness, and cost in planning and delivering patient care.

Rationale

The ACNP selects those diagnostic strategies and therapies that achieve optimum outcomes at minimum burden to patient and society.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Assists patients and families to access appropriate healthcare services.
2. Integrates analysis of cost and benefits in care decisions.
3. Develops innovative solutions for patient care problems that utilize resource efficiency while maintaining or improving quality.
4. Assists interdisciplinary team members, patients, and families in selecting therapies that integrate perspectives of cost and quality or benefits.
5. Serves as a resource to the public to influence healthcare policy formation, and advocates for policy to improve care access and delivery.

STANDARD VII. Leadership

The acute care nurse practitioner provides leadership in the practice setting and the profession.

Rationale

The ACNP is an expert in the clinical care of patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness, and the advanced practice nursing professional role.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Interprets the ACNP role to other healthcare providers and to the public.
2. Influences decision-making bodies at the system, state, and national levels to improve patient care.
3. Provides leadership to enhance the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary healthcare team.
4. Promotes dissemination of knowledge and advances the profession through writing, publishing, and presenting to professional or lay audiences.
5. Demonstrates leadership through teaching, coaching, and supporting others in the advancement of the plan of care for patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
6. Designs innovations to effect change in practice and improve health outcomes.
7. Serves in key roles in the work setting by participating in or leading committees, councils, and administrative teams.
8. Promotes advancement of the profession by participating in and assuming leadership positions in professional organizations that influence the health of acute, critical, and complex chronically-ill patients, and support the role of the ACNP.
9. Provides leadership in the initiation, application and revision of consensus-derived protocols or guidelines at the local or national level to promote evidence-based practice in the clinical setting.
10. Performs self-reflection and improvement of interpersonal skills that affect leadership potential.

STANDARD VIII. Collegiality

The acute care nurse practitioner contributes to the professional development of peers, colleagues, and others.

Rationale

The ACNP contributes to the professional development of others to improve patient outcomes and to foster the growth of the profession.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Contributes to a supportive and healthy work environment by encouraging and supporting open communication.
2. Identifies and participates in opportunities to share skills, knowledge, and strategies for patient care and system improvement with colleagues and other healthcare providers.

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3. Promotes a mutually respectful environment that enables nursing and other healthcare personnel to make optimal individual contributions, and systems to function most effectively.
4. Participates in professional organizations to address issues of concern in meeting patients' needs and improving nursing practice and system effectiveness.
5. Models expert practice to interdisciplinary team members and healthcare consumers.
6. Seeks opportunities to teach, coach, and mentor.
7. Promotes and facilitates active involvement of all members of the healthcare team, with a special attention to fostering and integrating the unique contributions of culturally diverse team members.

STANDARD IX. Quality of Practice

The acute care nurse practitioner systematically evaluates and enhances the quality and effectiveness of advanced nursing practice and care delivery across the continuum of acute care services.

Rationale

The ACNP, as a clinical expert, assumes a leadership role in establishing and monitoring standards of practice to improve patient care.

Measurement Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Participates in formal and informal evaluations of the quality and effectiveness of care delivered to patients with acute, critical, and complex chronic illness.
2. Participates in improvement of patient care and care outcomes through facilitation of interdisciplinary teams in evaluation of clinical practice.
3. Analyzes data generated through quality improvement initiatives to identify opportunities to enhance care and the care delivery system.
4. Formulates recommendations to improve clinical practice based upon data obtained from work environment, quality-of-care activities, and scientific evidence.
5. Participates in interdisciplinary efforts to improve access, minimize costs, eliminate duplication of services, and streamline patient movement across the continuum of acute care services.
6. Collaborates in the development, evaluation and update of clinical guidelines/standards/pathways, consistent with current science.
7. Obtains and maintains professional certification as an ACNP.
8. Designs initiatives to improve the quality of practice of the ACNP.
9. Acquires and incorporates new knowledge to improve patient outcomes and own professional performance through continuing education.

STANDARD X. Research

The acute care nurse practitioner continually explores scientific knowledge, identifies specific research priorities in practice, and strives to enhance knowledge and skills through participation in research studies and provision of evidenced-based practice.

Rationale

The ACNP provides evidence-based care to optimize patient outcomes. Furthermore, the ACNP participates in the research process to discover, test, and examine knowledge, theories, and creative approaches to practice.

Management Criteria

The ACNP:

1. Demonstrates informational literacy through the application of evidence-based practice to support decision making and improve practice.
2. Critically evaluates existing practice in light of current research findings.
3. Implements diagnostic strategies and treatment interventions substantiated by relevant research.
4. Applies clinical investigative skills for the evaluation of health and systems outcomes.
5. Formally disseminates investigative findings to colleagues locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally through presentations, publications, consultations and journal clubs.
6. Utilizes knowledge obtained through nursing research to influence healthcare policy that promotes improved health outcomes.
7. Integrates nursing research knowledge to improve and enhance healthcare and reduce disparities in health and healthcare outcomes.

REFERENCES

1. American Nurses Association. *Code of Ethics with Interpretive Statements*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Association; 2001.
2. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. *Ethic of Care*. Aliso Viejo, Calif: American Association of Critical-Care Nurses; 1999.