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# AACN SCOPE AND STANDARDS FOR ACUTE AND CRITICAL CARE NURSING PRACTICE

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Advocacy and Moral Agency  
systems thinking  
COLLABORATION  
*Response to Diversity* clinical inquiry  
CLINICAL JUDGMENT  
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clinical inquiry (innovator/evaluator)  
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AMERICAN  
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# STANDARDS OF CARE FOR ACUTE AND CRITICAL CARE NURSING PRACTICE

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The Standards of Care (pp 10-13) are intended to be used in conjunction with the Scope of Practice (pp 5-9), which addresses the role and boundaries of practice for acute and critical care nursing. The standards apply to the care that the acute and critical care nurse provides for all patients. The measurement criteria describe how each standard is met.

The professional practice of the acute and critical care nurse is characterized by the application of relevant theories, research, and evidence-based guidelines to explain human behavior and related phenomena. Such application also provides a basis for nursing intervention and evaluation of patient-oriented outcomes. It is recognized that acute and critical care nurses 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 practice.

The standards of care for the acute and critical care nurse build upon ANA's *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*<sup>1</sup> to delineate expectations in this specialty environment. The nursing process is used as the framework, which includes assessment, diagnosis, outcomes identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

## standard 1 ASSESSMENT

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient collects relevant data pertinent to the patient's health or situation.

Measurement criteria:

- Data are collected from the patient, family, other healthcare providers, and the community, as appropriate, to develop a holistic picture of the patient's needs.
- The priority of data collection activities is driven by the patient's characteristics related to the immediate condition and anticipated needs.
- Pertinent and sufficient data are collected using appropriate evidence-based assessment techniques and instruments.
- Analytical models and problem-solving tools are used.
- Decisions are made by matching formal knowledge with clinical findings.
- Relevant data are documented.
- Relevant data are communicated to other healthcare providers.

## standard 2 DIAGNOSIS

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient analyzes the assessment data in determining diagnosis and care issues.

Measurement criteria:

- Diagnoses and care issues are derived from the assessment data.
- Diagnoses and care issues are validated throughout the nursing interactions with the patient, family, other healthcare providers, the community, and across the healthcare system when possible and appropriate.
- Diagnoses and care issues are prioritized and documented in a manner that facilitates prioritizing outcomes and developing or modifying the plan.

## standard 3 OUTCOMES IDENTIFICATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient identifies outcomes for the patient or the patient's situation.

Measurement criteria:

- Outcomes are derived from actual or potential diagnoses and care issues.
- Outcomes are formulated in collaboration with the patient, family, and other healthcare providers, in relation to the level of participation in care and decision making.
- Outcomes recognize, appreciate, and incorporate differences.
- Outcomes are attainable in relation to resources available; outcomes consider associated risks, benefits, current evidence, clinical expertise, and cost.
- Outcomes provide direction for continuity of care.
- Outcomes include a target date for attainment.
- Outcomes are modified on the basis of changes in patient characteristics or evaluation of the situation.
- Outcomes are documented as measurable goals.

## standard 4 PLANNING

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient develops a plan that prescribes interventions to attain outcomes.

Measurement criteria:

- The plan is individualized and considers patient characteristics and the situation.
- The plan is developed collaboratively with the patient, family, and healthcare providers in a way that promotes each member's contribution toward achieving the outcomes.
- The plan reflects current best evidence.
- The plan provides for continuity of care, matching the nurse's competencies with the patient's characteristics.
- The plan establishes priorities for care.
- The plan includes strategies for promotion and restoration of health and prevention of further illness, injury, and disease.
- The plan considers economic impact and resources available.

## standard 5 IMPLEMENTATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient implements the plan, coordinates care delivery, and employs strategies to promote health and a safe environment.

Measurement criteria:

- Interventions are delivered in a manner that minimizes complications and life-threatening situations.
- The patient and family participate in implementing the plan according to their level of participation and decision-making capabilities.
- Interventions are responsive to the uniqueness of the patient and family and create a compassionate and therapeutic environment, with the aim to promote comfort and prevent suffering.
- The implemented plan and modifications are documented.
- Collaboration to implement the plan occurs with the patient, family, healthcare providers, and the healthcare system.
- The plan facilitates learning for patients, families, nursing staff, other members of the health-care team, and the community including but not limited to health teaching, health promotion, and disease management according to patient characteristics.

## standard 6 EVALUATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient evaluates progress toward attaining outcomes.

Measurement criteria:

- Evaluation is systematic and ongoing using evidence-based techniques and instruments.
- The team of patient, family, and healthcare providers is involved in the evaluation process as appropriate.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions toward achieving the desired outcome occurs.
- Evaluation occurs within an appropriate time frame after interventions are initiated.
- Ongoing assessment data are used to revise the diagnoses, outcomes, and plan as needed.
- Results of the evaluation are documented.

## reference

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<sup>1</sup>American Nurses Association. *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Association; 2004.

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# STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

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The Standards of Professional Performance describe a competent level of behavior in the professional role, including activities related to quality of professional practice, professional practice evaluation, education, collegiality, ethics, collaboration, research, resource utilization, and leadership. The measurement criteria describe how the standards are met. Although the Standards of Professional Performance delineate the expectations of all acute and critical care nurses, membership in professional organizations, certification, continuing education, and the pursuit of advanced degrees are additional methods of demonstrating professionalism.

## standard 1 QUALITY OF PRACTICE

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient systematically evaluates and seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse participates in clinical inquiry through quality improvement activities.
- The nurse uses systems thinking to initiate changes in nursing practice and the healthcare delivery system.
- The nurse ensures that quality improvement activities incorporate the patient's and family's beliefs, values, and preferences as appropriate.
- The nurse questions and evaluates practice in an ongoing process, providing informed practice and innovation through research and experiential learning.
- The nurse identifies organizational systems barriers to quality care and patient outcomes.
- The nurse collects data to monitor the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice.
- The nurse develops, implements, evaluates, and updates policies, procedures, and/or guidelines to improve the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice.

## standard 2 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE EVALUATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient evaluates his or her own nursing practice in relation to professional practice standards, institutional guidelines, relevant statutes, rules, and regulations.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse engages in a self-assessment and/or formal performance appraisal on a regular basis, identifying areas of strength as well as areas where professional development would be beneficial.
- The nurse seeks and reflects on constructive feedback regarding his or her own competencies from the team of patient, family, and other healthcare providers.
- The nurse takes action to achieve performance goals.

## standard 3 EDUCATION

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The nurse acquires and maintains current knowledge and competency in the care of acutely and critically ill patients.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse participates in ongoing learning activities to acquire and refine the knowledge and skills needed to care for acutely and critically ill patients and their families.
- The nurse seeks learning opportunities that reflect evidence-based practice in order to maintain clinical skills and competencies needed to care for acutely and critically ill patients and families.
- The nurse participates in ongoing learning activities related to professional practice.
- The nurse maintains professional records that provide evidence of competency and lifelong learning.

## standard 4 COLLEGIALLY

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient interacts with and contributes to the professional development of peers and other healthcare providers as colleagues.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse shares knowledge, skills, and experiences with peers and colleagues.
- The nurse provides peers and colleagues with constructive feedback regarding their practice.
- The nurse interacts with peers and colleagues to enhance his or her own professional practice and promote optimal patient outcomes.
- The nurse contributes to a supportive and healthy work environment that is conducive to the education of healthcare professionals.
- The nurse contributes to a healthy work environment by working with others in a way that promotes mutual respect and meaningful recognition of each person's contribution.

## standard 5 ETHICS

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The nurse's decisions and actions are carried out in an ethical manner in all areas of practice.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse's practice is guided by the ANA *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*,<sup>1</sup> the AACN Ethic of Care,<sup>2</sup> and ethical principles.
- The nurse maintains patient confidentiality within legal and regulatory parameters.
- The nurse works on another's behalf and represents the concerns of patients, their families, and the community.
- The nurse delivers care in a nonjudgmental and nondiscriminatory manner that meets the diverse needs, strengths, and weaknesses of the patient and preserves patient autonomy, dignity, and rights.
- The nurse uses available resources in formulating ethical decisions.
- The nurse demonstrates a commitment to self-care and self-advocacy.
- The nurse reports illegal, incompetent, or impaired practices.

## standard 6 COLLABORATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient uses skilled communication to collaborate with the team of patient, family, and healthcare providers in providing patient care in a safe, healing, humane, and caring environment.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse uses skilled communication to foster true collaboration.
- The nurse partners with others to effect change and generate optimal outcomes through knowledge of the patient or situation.
- The nurse commits to establishing and maintaining a healthy work environment.
- The nurse initiates referrals as appropriate to promote continuity of care.
- The nurse collaborates with the patient's family and significant others to promote effective transition across care settings.

## standard 7 RESEARCH/CLINICAL INQUIRY

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient uses clinical inquiry and integrates research findings into practice.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse continually questions and evaluates practice and uses the best available evidence, including research findings, to guide practice decisions.
- The nurse participates in activities to support clinical inquiry as appropriate to the nurse's skills, knowledge and experience.

## standard 8 RESOURCE UTILIZATION

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient considers factors related to safety, effectiveness, cost, and impact in planning and delivering nursing services.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse considers factors related to safety, effectiveness, availability, cost, and impact on outcomes when choosing among practice options.
- The nurse assists the patient and family in identifying and securing appropriate and available services to address health-related needs according to resource availability.
- The nurse assigns or delegates aspects of care, based upon an assessment of the needs and condition of the patient, the potential for harm, the stability of the patient's condition, the predictability of the outcome, the availability and competence of the healthcare provider, and the availability of resources.
- The nurse assists the patient and family to become informed consumers by facilitating learning of the options, alternatives, risks, benefits, and costs for treatment and care.

## standard 9 LEADERSHIP

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The nurse caring for the acutely and critically ill patient provides leadership in the professional practice setting as well as the profession.

Measurement criteria:

- The nurse works to create and maintain healthy work environments in local, regional, national, and international communities.
- The nurse encourages peers and colleagues through mentoring and other strategies.
- The nurse demonstrates flexibility and the ability to remain patient-focused in a rapidly changing environment.
- The nurse directs the coordination of care across the continuum and among caregivers, including oversight of licensed and unlicensed personnel in any assigned or delegated tasks.
- The nurse participates on committees, councils, and administrative teams.
- The nurse promotes advancement of the profession through participation in professional organizations.
- The nurse contributes to a culture of safety for patients, families, nurses, and other healthcare providers.
- The nurse promotes communication of information and advancement of the profession through writing, publishing, and presentations for professional and lay audiences.
- The nurse uses a proven systematic methodology in the development and implementation of innovative solutions.

## references

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<sup>1</sup>American Nurses Association. *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Association; 2001.

<sup>2</sup>American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. *Mission, Vision, Values, and an Ethic of Care*. Aliso Viejo, CA: American Association of Critical-Care Nurses; 1997.