General Practice Nursing

“The College has a long and proud history of encouraging and enabling its members to work towards improving the standard of care for patients. Whether through courses, online learning tools or reflection, if teams can share their experiences and put their learning into practice, individuals and the team as a unit can better serve our patients.”

Jenny Aston, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Chair RCGP General Practice Foundation Nursing Group

The General Practice Foundation is an RCGP initiative which offers general practice nurses, managers and physician assistants the opportunity to be a part of the Royal College of General Practitioners. Through providing practice teams with valuable educational materials and association with the College, the Foundation aims to support the professional development of the wider primary care team and to enhance levels of patient care.

We have produced this document as a guide to general practice nursing, which provides information on the following areas:

1. The role of the practice nurse
2. Career progression
3. Guidance on employment
4. Training
5. Leadership and management
6. Useful links
7. A-Z handbook

We hope the information below assists those wanting to know more about what general practice nursing involves or looking for advice and resources related to the profession.

The role of the practice nurse

Nurses are an important part of delivering care in general practice. Current policy is increasing the shift of care from hospital to general practice providing nurses with a really exciting career choice.

The General Practice Career Framework provides a clear pathway which nurses can use to guide and shape their career within general practice.

The skill mix in general practice now often includes Health Care Assistants (level 2 - 4), Practice Nurses (5 - 7), Advanced Nurse Practitioners (7 - 8) and Nurse Partners (level 9).

Career progression

Framework for nursing in general practice

There are nine levels on the General Practice Nurse Framework, advancing from level 1, which is the position of an entry level job without official qualifications, through to level 9, where the nurse is considered as a senior member of staff who would be involved in the decision making for the practice and its investment and income.

Once you have reached level 5 a nurse may officially take on the title of a “General Practice Nurse”. There are apprenticeship schemes available to aid those who would like to become General Practice
Nurses (GPNs). Some practices may in fact stipulate it as mandatory that a nurse has completed one of these apprenticeship schemes before he/she takes on this title.

For further information concerning the framework of career development it is best to refer to the nationally approved framework, the General Practice Nursing Career Framework. The General Practice Nursing Career Framework was recently created in order to reflect the changing nature of nursing within general practice. In doing so, the career development of General Practice Nurses has become more coherent. The Framework highlights the levels which a GPN can reach, and the career advancement opportunities which may be available to you.

**Competency framework**

Due to the rising levels of responsibility for many nurses within general practice there is a higher expectation and demand that all nurses are appropriately qualified for the duties they are taking on. Competency frameworks are a way of distinguishing the different progressions that are made within the profession.

Some general practices may use National Occupational Standards which are very useful for the team in creating a common language and set of standards to work to. The competency framework implemented within your workplace will require you to invite assessments of competence so that you can move forward in the knowledge of what you have achieved and what further developments are ahead. It is also vital that you perform self-assessments regularly, perhaps noting down the key developments you have made and in which you areas you would like to progress further.

Meeting these competency achievements will also strengthen your professional accountability, which involves being able to justify professional actions even when they are not against the law. Indicating the different competencies required for different levels of nursing will ensure that practice staff are aware of their abilities and limits.

**Guidance on employment**

Terms and conditions of service can vary from practice to practice. The main areas to consider are the salary, hours of duty, tenure of post, annual leave and period of notice required. Study leave entitlement and payment for travel as well as pension arrangements should be discussed before any contract is agreed. The NHS system, Agenda for Change, is a popular guide for the production of terms and conditions for staff within practices and can be a very useful tool for you to use when investigating the contract you are signing. Although Agenda for Change may not be implemented by all GPs, it still has a significant influence over employers and the terms and conditions they offer to staff.

See [Agenda for Change](https://www.rcgp.org.uk) for more information.

**Contracts**

All new employees should receive a contract within two months of starting their role at the practice. This contract is an important document consisting of the terms and conditions of employment which can be used if there are any problems concerning your role and employment. Your employer will also be in receipt of an original copy, so that both parties are able to draw upon it if required. The contract should also indicate whether the practice receives funding to support the training of its staff.

**Employer’s obligations**

At the beginning of your employment at a practice you must be confident that the practice complies with the following legal requirements:
- Personnel records must be kept for all employed staff

- Practices should provide a formal period of induction, for which a named member of staff takes responsibility

- An agreed disciplinary/grievance procedure should be in place that adheres to the ACAS code of practice

- A written procedure manual covering employment policies must be available to staff. (Including equal opportunities, bullying and harassment, maternity leave and sickness absence)

- Nurses and HCAs have the right to join the Superannuation Scheme

- A degree of flexibility in working hours should be offered to allow nurses and HCAs

- A safe and comfortable working environment should be provided

- If Agenda for Change is implemented by the practice, their policies should reflect this

- All nurses and HCAs require personal development plans for review at annual appraisal

- Nurses and HCAs must have access to mandatory training updates on a regular basis

- IT access should be available to nurses or HCAs during all clinical consultations

- GP employers should be aware of the boundaries imposed by the NMC Code of Professional Conduct when delegating duties to nurses and HCAs

**Employee’s obligations**

Practice nurses are required by the NMC to maintain a learning portfolio which tracks your professional achievements and development. This will be checked every three years and at this point you will need to provide evidence that you have spent at least five days on study leave during this period. The employee must also be dedicated to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) throughout their career.

Being aware of your employment rights and obligations is very important for any General Practice Nurse as it will help in any instance where “professional isolation” may be a problem.

**Job description**

There are some examples of job descriptions for nurses working in General Practice on the RCN website. It is important to ensure that all aspects of the role are included in the job description.

**Induction**

At the beginning of your employment with the practice you should be given an induction. This is a significant step in the process of being integrated into a team. An induction will involve meeting employees within the practice, especially those you may have quite close contact with, and being introduced to the work ethic within the practice and to certain situations unique to that particular organisation. This will increase your initial level of confidence, help you feel committed to the cause of your role and feel a part of the team from an early stage.
Appraisal

The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework has been produced by the NHS as a way of aiding NHS employees in the development of their careers. It highlights the knowledge and skills required for certain roles and emphasises the importance of annual reviews in career development. Appraisal is able to inform you of how you have performed in your role, how you are valued within the team, and how you could improve your performance or develop your career. Membership of the Foundation will provide access to an e-portfolio when it is set up in the near future.

Personal Development Plans

In order to complete appraisals effectively it is vital that you have thought about the future of your career and how your employer or team could help with any concerns or needs you have. It is also the responsibility of your employer to think carefully for you in this area. One way in which you may discover where you would like to go with your career may include performing a self-assessment on a regular basis. You can also invest some time in creating a personal development plan (PDP) once you have completed an appraisal. In the creation of a PDP you can indicate the areas you hope to change and whether it is a personal, practice-based or national priority which drives these goals. At the next appraisal you can review your PDP and see what has and has not been achieved. Appraisals are beneficial to both you and the practice, as they guide you in your career, but also enhance levels of patient care by encouraging you to increase your level of competence.

The General Practice Foundation is soon making Revalidation ePortfolio to GPF members, which will be suitable for nurses to record their PDP and record all the training for their portfolio.

Training

Learning is an extremely important part of being a General Practice Nurse. The prospect of formal learning and CPD, however, can be daunting, especially if you have not been in the educational environment recently. There are, however, many ways of learning and there will be a number of methods which suit you. Learning can be a very active process, and it is important that you are able to access the variety of educational options which are available to you.

In order to make the learning process of the General Practice Nurse more accessible, the General Practice Foundation provides access to a number of useful learning tools.

Mandatory training

As employees there are certain requirements which health and safety legislation require such as fire training and moving and handling training.

- Child Protection Training: All nurses and HCAs working in general practice will require initial and regular updates to ensure that they are kept aware of child protection issues.
- Annual Basic Life Support training is a requirement of QOF for all clinical staff working in general practice.
- Immunisation and Anaphylaxis training would be necessary for all nurses who are immunising or carrying out travel vaccinations in general practice.
- Cervical Cytology Training are increasingly becoming mandatory by PCTs and recommended by all cytology laboratories.
Independent Prescriber Training: Nurses wishing to extend their role to become prescribers will need the support of a GP to be able to become safe and competent as a prescriber. The Department of Health has produced guidance on these courses.

Leadership and management

Political leadership in primary care

In an effective general practice the right degree of political input and leadership should result in excellent teamwork and patient care. Teamwork is important in general practice as it encourages the input of different viewpoints and perspectives, provides a wider network of professional support and a greater breadth of past experience to draw upon. For those in a leadership position it is valuable to know about each individual's life experience and professional qualifications in order to ensure that their skills are being used effectively within the team. The team must be well co-ordinated and structured in order to create a good “care pathway”. The leaders within the practice are therefore responsible for creating an environment which encourages communication and inter-professional relationships. General Practice Nurses may often be a part of this process, especially as they become more senior. It is important that the policies in place within the practice reflect these ideas in order to produce higher levels of care and a positive working environment.

Management issues

In a multi-disciplinary team such as those in general practices, it is likely that professional divisions will exist. These divisions are problematic for the efficiency of the practice and the levels of care it seeks to provide. It is therefore the responsibility of those within the leadership team to co-ordinate care in a way which encourages communication between the different professionals that are working with a patient. It is also important for those involved to be committed to the cause of integration, to be open, to be proactive about sharing information, and to have a mutual understanding and respect for each other.

Teamwork and communication can also be improved through the delivery of multi-professional learning resources. It is vital that managers and leaders facilitate and use learning programmes which involve the different professions of the primary health care team. This will firstly make the learning itself more in-depth, but it will also widen each individual’s perspective of primary healthcare and their role within it.

An example of the importance of communication can be found in the coordination of clinical supervision which many nurses working in general practice may wish to arrange. Clinical supervision involves the meeting of a supervisor with another professional in order to discuss casework and other professional issues in a structured manner. Some practices may already have a system in place for clinical supervision to be carried out. If the practice you are working at does not, and you would like to implement it, you will need to discuss this with the management team. Clear communication and openness is vital at this point. It is recommended that these meetings occur in a place where there will not be any interruption and that they happen on a monthly or six-weekly basis. Meetings that occur more than this may not be accepted by the management team. In a circumstance such as this, it is important to maintain a good basis of communication with the members of the practice team who will
not be directly involved in these sessions, outlining what the purpose is and how the sessions will aid the practice.

Useful links

If you’d like to recommend any further links please email us at gpf@rcgp.org.uk

RCGP General Practice Foundation

Advanced Nurse Practitioner Competencies (RCN)

Advanced Practice Portfolio for Wales

Agenda for Change (RCN)

Association for Nurse Prescribers

BBC Health

British Menopause Society

Clinical Knowledge Summaries (NPC)

General Practice Nursing Career Framework (RCN)

Easyhealth.org.uk

Education for Health

General Practice Nurse Training Programme

Healthcare Republic/GP Online

International Council for Nurses

Knowledge and Skills Framework (RCN)

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

National Prescribing Centre

Non-Medical Training (Department of Health)

Nurse Partner Factsheet

Scottish Practice Nurse Association

A-Z Handbook for Nurses in General Practice

An adaptable practical companion for every practice nurse

Packed with information, the A-Z Handbook is an adaptable working tool: rearrange the loose-leaf pages, add your own local contacts and protocols on the relevant pages, check the "Red flags" for minor ailments, use the Diary planner to set patients’ recall dates.
"The A to Z Handbook is a ‘must-have’ companion for nurses wishing to pursue a career in general practice."

Dr Steven L Brown, MA, LLB, LLM, MB ChB, DCH, DRCOG, FRCGP
General Practitioner and GP Trainer

"This is a comprehensive practical manual packed with very relevant information to support general practice nursing teams in providing up-to-date evidence-based patient care. This is a "must have" for every general practice nurse’s desk, no matter at what staged they are at in their career."

Dorf Ruscoe, Associate Professor in General Practice Nursing and General Practice Lead, University of Plymouth

The RCGP General Practice Foundation recommends this useful tool.

Practice discount on order for 2 or more copies!

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