



The Essentials: ***Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education*** **Executive Summary**

Since 1986, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has published the *Essentials*, which provide the educational framework and expectations for the preparation of nurses at four-year colleges and universities. In April 2021, AACN's members voted to approve [*The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education*](#), which will transform how nurses are prepared in baccalaureate, master's, and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs. Built on a strong foundation of nursing as a discipline, the benefits of a liberal education, and the principles of competency-based education, the re-envisioned *Essentials* present a new model and framework for preparing registered nurses for contemporary practice.

The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education calls for a transition to competency-based education focusing on two levels of professional nursing education: entry-level and advanced-level nursing practice. This model provides the structure across education programs and provides a mechanism to adapt to future changes within nursing education. Competencies for professional nursing practice are made explicit. These Essentials introduce 10 domains and the expected competencies for each domain that represent professional nursing practice and reflect the diversity of practice settings. The competencies are applicable across four spheres of care (disease prevention/promotion of health and wellbeing, chronic disease care, regenerative or restorative care, and hospice/palliative/supportive care), across the lifespan, and with diverse patient populations.

While the domains and competencies are broad in scope and cross all levels and areas of nursing practice, the sub-competencies build from entry into advanced professional nursing practice. The sub-competencies are designed to be understandable, observable, and measurable by learner, faculty, and future employers. The intent is that any curricular design should provide the learner sufficient and diverse opportunities to achieve and demonstrate the competencies. Since this document has been developed with practice partners and with other nursing colleagues, the *Essentials serve to bridge the transition between education and practice*.

Domains for Nursing

Domains are broad distinguishable areas of competence that, when considered in the aggregate, constitute a descriptive framework for the practice of nursing. The new Essentials delineates the domains essential to nursing practice, including how these are defined, what competencies should be expected for each domain at each level of nursing, and how those domains and competencies both distinguish nursing and relate to other health professions. The Domains include:

- **Domain 1: Knowledge for Nursing Practice** encompasses the integration, translation, and application of disciplinary nursing knowledge and ways of knowing, as well as knowledge from other disciplines, including a foundation in liberal arts and natural and social sciences.
- **Domain 2: Person-Centered Care** focuses on the individual within multiple complicated contexts, including family and/or important others. Person-centered care is holistic, individualized, just, respectful, compassionate, coordinated, evidence-based, and developmentally appropriate.
- **Domain 3: Population Health** spans the healthcare delivery continuum from prevention to disease management of populations and describes collaborative activities with affected communities, public health, industry, academia, health care, local government entities, and others for the improvement of equitable population health outcomes.

- **Domain 4: Scholarship for Nursing Practice** involves the generation, synthesis, translation, application, and dissemination of nursing knowledge to improve health and transform health care.
- **Domain 5: Quality and Safety**, as core values of nursing practice, involves enhancing quality and minimizing risk of harm to patients and providers through both system effectiveness and individual performance.
- **Domain 6: Interprofessional Partnerships** involves intentional collaboration across professions and with care team members, patients, families, communities, and other stakeholders to optimize care, enhance the healthcare experience, and strengthen outcomes.
- **Domain 7: Systems-Based Practice** prepares nurses to lead within complex systems of health care. Nurses must effectively coordinate resources to provide safe, quality, equitable care to diverse populations.
- **Domain 8: Informatics and Healthcare Technologies** are used to provide safe, high quality care, gather data, form information to drive decision making, and support professionals as they expand knowledge and wisdom for practice.
- **Domain 9: Professionalism** involves cultivating a sustainable professional nursing identity, perspective, accountability, and comportment that reflects nursing's characteristics and values.
- **Domain 10: Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development** includes activities and self-reflection that foster personal health, resilience, and well-being, lifelong learning, and support the acquisition of nursing expertise and assertion of leadership.

Concepts for Nursing Practice

The Essentials also feature 8 concepts which are central to professional nursing practice and are integrated within and across the domains and competencies. A concept is an organizing idea or a mental abstraction that represents important areas of knowledge. Each Essentials concept serves as a core component of knowledge, facts, and skills across multiple situations and contexts within nursing practice. Each concept functions as a hub for transferable knowledge, thus enhancing learning when learners make cognitive links to other information through mental constructs. The integration of concepts within the competencies and sub-competencies is essential for the application throughout the educational experience and serve as a foundation to students' learning. The featured concepts are:

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| • Clinical Judgment | • Ethics |
| • Communication | • Evidence-Based Practice |
| • Compassionate Care | • Health Policy |
| • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion | • Social Determinants of Health |

These Essentials represent an opportunity for a future characterized by greater clarity as it relates to expectations of graduates and a more disciplined approach to nursing education. Competencies are used within the academic program as core expectations, thus setting a common standard. Additional elements within a degree plan will allow schools to differentiate degree paths using the same sub-competencies and to distinguish themselves in alignment with various institutional missions.

This model adapts to the current state of nursing education, and perhaps more importantly, provides a path for an evolving trajectory for nursing education. Over time, higher education, stakeholder demands, nursing regulatory standards, and economics are among the many forces that will drive the direction and pace of change for nursing education in the future.

Click [here](#) to access the entire *Essentials* document.