



Introducing the CLINICAL NURSE LEADERSM



American Association of Colleges of Nursing
The Voice of Academic Nursing

Introducing *the* CLINICAL NURSE LEADERSM

The **Clinical Nurse LeaderSM or CNL[®]** is a fast emerging nursing role developed by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in collaboration with leaders from the education and practice arenas. The national movement to advance the CNL is fueled by the critical need to improve the quality of patient care and better prepare nurses to thrive across the health care system. The CNL role was developed following research and discussion with stakeholder groups as a way to engage highly skilled clinicians as leaders in outcomes-based practice.

Clinical Nurse Leaders provide lateral integration at the point of care and combine evidence-based practice with ...

- Microsystems-Level Advocacy
- Centralized Care Coordination
- Outcomes Measurement
- Risk Assessment
- Quality Improvement
- Interprofessional Communication

In practice, the CNL oversees the care coordination of a distinct group of patients and actively provides direct patient care in complex situations. This master's degree-prepared, advanced generalist evaluates patient outcomes, assesses risks, and has the decision-making authority to change care plans when necessary. The CNL is a leader in the health care delivery system, and the implementation of this role will vary across settings.





Connecting Nursing Practice and Education

To support the creation of this new nursing role, AACN launched a national initiative involving more than 100 education-practice partnerships across the nation. Partners from schools of nursing and practice sites are working together to transform care delivery by educating new CNLs and integrating this clinical role into the health delivery system.

More than 90 schools of nursing are now preparing CNLs in advanced generalist programs offered at the graduate level. Students may choose from traditional post-baccalaureate master's programs, degree completion programs for Registered Nurses (RNs), and accelerated programs for those seeking to transition into nursing. Most CNL programs are directly connected with a practice site interested in utilizing graduates to enhance care delivery, patient safety, and quality outcomes.

The Veterans Health Administration, the nation's largest employer of RNs, has embraced the CNL role and is moving to introduce this clinician into all VA hospitals nationwide. Support for the role is gaining momentum as more and more practice sites are reporting positive outcomes attributed to the CNL pioneers on the staff.

"This new role continues to engage VA nurses in the visionary redesign of nursing practice with a focus on safe and efficient quality care outcomes for our nation's veterans. I am fully committed to the implementation of the Clinical Nurse Leader role in all VA medical centers, across all care settings."

Cathy Rick, RN, CNAA, FACHE
Former Chief Nursing Officer
Office of Nursing Services
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The Key to Positive Patient Outcomes

Clinical Nurse Leaders provide efficient and cost-effective patient care services as well as the leadership needed to repair fragmented care delivery across settings. CNLs are having a measurable impact on the quality of nursing services with practice settings reporting that CNLs ...

- **Are quickly making significant progress on raising patient, nurse, and physician satisfaction; improving care outcomes; and realizing sizable cost-savings.**
- **Elevate the level of practice for all nurses** on the unit by promoting critical thinking and innovation in nursing care.
- **Constructively manage change** and promote a team-based approach to care.
- **Understand the bigger picture**, including outcomes and patient satisfaction, when considering next steps, needed changes, and improvements to the setting.



The CNL Mark of Excellence

Clinical Nurse Leader certification is a unique credential that recognizes graduates of master's and post-master's Clinical Nurse Leader programs who have demonstrated accepted standards of practice. The CNL mark of excellence promotes safe, quality practice through its ongoing requirements for personal and professional growth. In 2007, AACN established a new certification entity – the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC) – to oversee all aspects of the CNL Certification Program.

Becoming a CNL

Those interested in becoming a Clinical Nurse Leader are encouraged to visit the AACN Web site to find out more about this nursing career option. Detailed information is available online including Frequently Asked Questions, the white paper on the CNL role, and a directory of Web links to programs enrolling students. Access the online CNL Resource at [**www.aacnnursing.org/CNL**](http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL).



"To me, a clinical nurse leader is a bedside, clinic or community nurse who also works as a leader to improve a hospital or larger healthcare system. CNLs are needed to care for patients in crisis and advocate for better care for those whose voices are not being heard."

Susan Goins-Eplee, MSN, RN, CNL graduate from the University of Virginia



Establishing a CNL Practice-Education Partnership

If you are considering, planning, or have a CNL or advanced generalist master's-degree program, AACN invites you to become part of the network of schools that are implementing this new curricular model. Being part of this network provides opportunities to learn what others are doing, share strategies, and gain access to the latest information and materials to support your program. Practice sites interested in finding out more about the CNL and establishing a partnership with a local school of nursing are encouraged to make contact with AACN. Please direct all inquiries to Dr. Joan Stanley, AACN Senior Director of Education Policy, at jstanley@aacnnursing.org.

Updates on the Clinical Nurse Leader

Regular updates on the CNL initiative are featured in *AACN News Watch*, a monthly email newsletter. To subscribe, send an email request to newswatch@aacnnursing.org.



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"I have been a CNO at HCA for 14 years, and I believe the adoption of the CNL program and all the best practices it sets in motion will be an important contribution to our profession. I am truly passionate about this model of care."

Nancy Hilton, MN, RN, Chief Nurse Officer,
St. Lucie Medical Center

