



Real Nurses. Real Issues. Real Solutions.

**DEFINITION
OF
PROFESSIONAL AMBULATORY CARE NURSING**

Report

Submitted by the

American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing Task Force

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American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing

Definition of Ambulatory Care Nursing

Professional ambulatory care nursing is a complex, multi-faceted specialty that encompasses independent and collaborative practice. The comprehensive practice of ambulatory care nursing is built on a broad knowledge base of nursing and health sciences, and applies clinical expertise rooted in the nursing process. Nurses use evidence based information across a variety of outpatient health care settings to achieve and ensure patient safety and quality of care while improving patient outcomes.

Ambulatory care includes those clinical, organizational and professional activities engaged in by registered nurses with and for individuals, groups, and populations who seek assistance with improving health and/or seek care for health-related problems. Registered nurses promote optimal wellness, participate in the management of acute illness, assist the patient to manage the effects of chronic disease and disability, and provide support in end-of-life care. The ambulatory care registered nurse is accountable for the provision of nursing care in accordance with relevant federal requirements, state laws and nurse practice acts, regulatory standards, the standards of professional ambulatory care nursing practice, other relevant professional standards, and organizational policies.

Defining Characteristics

1. Ambulatory nursing care requires critical reasoning and astute clinical judgment in order to expedite appropriate care and treatment, especially given that the patient may present with complex problems or potentially life threatening conditions.
2. Ambulatory care registered nurses provide care across the life span to individuals, families, caregivers, groups, populations, and communities.
3. Ambulatory care nursing occurs across the continuum of care in a variety of settings, which include but are not limited to hospital-based clinic/centers, solo or group medical practices, ambulatory surgery & diagnostic procedure centers, telehealth service environments, university and community hospital clinics, military and veterans administration settings, nurse-managed clinics, managed care organizations, colleges and educational institutions, free standing community facilities, care coordination organizations, and patient homes.
4. Ambulatory care registered nurses interact with patients during face-to-face encounters or through a variety of telecommunication strategies, often establishing long- term relationships.
5. Telehealth nursing is an integral component of professional ambulatory care nursing that utilizes a variety of telecommunications' technologies during encounters to

assess, triage, provide nursing consultation, and perform follow up and surveillance of patients' status and outcomes.

6. During each encounter, the ambulatory care registered nurse focuses on patient safety and the quality of nursing care by applying appropriate nursing interventions, such as identifying and clarifying patient needs, performing procedures, conducting health education, promoting patient advocacy, coordinating nursing and other health services, assisting the patient to navigate the health care system, and evaluating patient outcomes.
7. Nurse-patient encounters can occur once or as a series of occurrences, are usually less than 24 hours in length at any one time, and occur singly or in-group settings.
8. Ambulatory care registered nurses, acting as partners and advisors, assist and support patients and families to optimally manage their health care, respecting their culture and values, individual needs, health goals and treatment preferences.
9. Ambulatory care registered nurses facilitate continuity of care using the nursing process, multidisciplinary collaboration, and coordination of appropriate health care services and community resources across the care continuum.
10. Ambulatory care registered nurses are knowledgeable about and provide leadership in the clinical and managerial operations of the organization.

11. Ambulatory care registered nurses design, administer, and evaluate nursing services within the organization in accord with relevant federal requirements, state laws and nurse practice acts, regulatory standards, and institutional policies and procedures.

12. Ambulatory care registered nurses provide operational accountability for and coordination of nursing services, including the appropriate skill mix and delegation of roles and responsibilities for licensed and unlicensed nursing personnel.

13. Ambulatory care registered nurses apply the provisions of the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses to their own professional obligations and for the patients entrusted to their care.

14. Ambulatory care registered nurses pursue lifelong learning that updates and expands their clinical, organizational, and professional roles and responsibilities.

Glossary of Terms

Continuum of care -- Over the course of the patient's life, the patient will receive health-related care from a variety of health care and service professionals in a variety of health care settings (AAACN, 2010, p. 41).

Continuity of care – Health care that remains consistent and uninterrupted throughout the care process (AAACN, 2010, p. 41).

Nursing process – The nursing process is a rational, systematic method of planning, providing and evaluating nursing care. It has six steps: assessment; nursing diagnosis; identification of expected outcomes or goals; planning; implementation; and evaluation. (AAACN, 2010, p. 15)

Nursing personnel (Licensed) – Licensed personnel in ambulatory care include registered, practical and vocational nurses, serving in both clinical and administrative roles, who have completed an appropriate course of nursing studies, passed a national nursing board examination, and meet state nursing board requirements. Licensed nursing personnel also include advanced practice nurses (APNs) who have completed advanced nursing studies, are certified in specialty care areas, and function as independent practitioners.

Nursing personnel (Unlicensed) – Unlicensed nursing personnel in ambulatory care include medical administrative personnel, medical and nursing assistants, and other technical assistive staff.

Nursing skill mix -- In ambulatory care settings, this term refers to the different levels of licensed and unlicensed nursing personnel who provide patient care.

Telehealth nursing practice – The delivery, management, and coordination of care and services provided via telecommunications technology within the domain of ambulatory care nursing. Telehealth nursing is a broad term encompassing practices that incorporate a vast array of telecommunications technologies, (e.g. telephone, fax, email, Internet, video monitoring, and interactive videos) to remove time and distance barriers for the delivery of nursing care. (Espensen, 2009, p. 5)

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