

COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF NURSING REGULATORY BODIES AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Nursing regulatory bodies and professional associations have distinct yet complementary roles that advance nursing excellence in the public interest. Regulatory bodies focus on public protection through the establishment of standards and by overseeing nurses' individual practice. Professional associations focus on advancing the profession and advocating for quality health outcomes.

Examples of areas in which nursing regulatory bodies and professional associations complement one another include the following:

- ▶ Continuing competence: through the establishment of requirements (regulators) or supports (associations)
- ▶ Professional socialization: through outreach to students (some regulators/associations) and new nursing graduates (regulators/associations)
- ▶ Enhancing the integrity of the profession: through the establishment of standards (regulators) and the promotion of nurses as trusted professionals (associations)
- ▶ Supporting quality practice environments: through practice resources which identify attributes of safe nursing practice and support public protection (regulators)¹ and related professional resources and supports to facilitate collaboration and enhance client outcomes (associations).
- ▶ Ensuring public safety:² by the establishment of entry-to-practice competencies and requirements and practice standards (regulators) and by advocacy and professional development supports (associations).

Through its professional and regulatory organizations, the nursing profession advances nursing practice, identifies practice standards and promotes professional development.

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), as the national professional association for registered nurses (RNs), believes the collective work of nursing regulatory bodies and professional nursing associations demonstrates the profession's commitment to upholding the public's trust. Nurses, employers, educational institutions and

¹ (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2014)

² Through initiatives such as mitigating and managing nurse fatigue.

governments^{3,4,5} also share the responsibility of promoting continuing competence by working in coordination with nursing regulatory bodies and professional nursing associations.

CNA believes that, as the nursing role continues to evolve in Canada, regulatory bodies and professional associations should continue to collaborate with each other and build consensus among stakeholders while fulfilling their respective mandates and promoting cohesiveness for the profession in the public interest.

BACKGROUND

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has identified three key program areas (the ICN pillars) as crucial to the betterment of nursing and health: professional practice, regulation and socio-economic welfare.⁶

Historically, professional practice and regulation have worked together in Canada, with most provincial and territorial RN associations holding both mandates. In recent years, certain provinces have required that distinct health-care professional regulatory bodies be established; a change that has led to the formation of separate RN organizations (i.e., one regulatory body and one professional association within a province). In a number of jurisdictions, a single organization continues to serve a range of crossover functions.⁷

Regulatory bodies

In Canada, nursing is a self-regulated profession in which regulatory bodies have a mandate to protect the public and advance nursing excellence. Provincial and territorial governments mandate and delegate to nursing regulatory bodies (by statute) the power to regulate themselves and ensure the profession remains accountable to the public and governments. More specifically, the regulation of RNs is defined “in jurisdictional legislation, e.g., in RN acts and other documents (such as standards of practice) developed by provincial and territorial regulatory bodies.”⁸ These regulatory bodies achieve this mandate “by ensuring that RNs are safe, competent and ethical practitioners through a variety of regulatory activities. . . . To maintain public protection, [nurses] engage in self-regulation as a profession and as individuals.”⁹

Examples of nursing regulatory body activities:¹⁰

³ (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2004)

⁴ (Hospice and Palliative Credentialing Center, 2011)

⁵ (American Nurses Association, 2008)

⁶ (International Council of Nurses, 2015)

⁷ For example, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, et al.

⁸ (CNA, 2015, p. 6)

⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- ▶ Establishing registration and licensing processes
- ▶ Establishing, monitoring and enforcing standards in ethics, professional conduct and practice
- ▶ Establishing nursing education standards and approving nursing education programs leading to initial entry into the profession
- ▶ Establishing and maintaining the scope of practice as health-care delivery and nursing knowledge advances
- ▶ Establishing and maintaining entry-level competencies required for initial registration
- ▶ Establishing, monitoring and maintaining quality assurance and continuing competence requirements
- ▶ Establishing and maintaining professional conduct review processes to investigate allegations/complaints and concerns about nurses' practice, and implementing disciplinary action as required

Professional associations

Professional associations advance nursing excellence and positive health outcomes in the public interest. They promote better quality of care and patient safety by providing resources and tools to help individual nurses meet ongoing regulatory requirements such as continuing competence, professional standards and ethical practice.

Professional associations advocate for nurses and nursing in the public interest by providing national and international leadership in nursing and health and by influencing the development of healthy public policy. In addition, they support member collegiality, provide professional nursing links, and raise awareness of nurses' vital role and contribution to the health-care sector.

These functions and activities, together with the individual nurse's involvement by reading professional journals, attending professional meetings and serving on professional committees, support the socialization of nurses into their profession.¹¹ As Wynd (2003) concludes: "Those nurses who join professional organizations begin to perceive themselves as more professional . . . and thus increased professionalism may influence the recruitment and retention of dedicated nurses, resulting in improved outcomes for patients."¹²

Examples of professional association activities:

- ▶ Establishing specialty nursing networks and related specialty standards of practice
- ▶ Providing specialty nursing certification programs

¹¹ (Hall, 1967, 1968, 1982)

¹² (p. 258)

- ▶ Supporting nurse professional development through continuing education
- ▶ Informing members of health and health-system issues
- ▶ Developing a code of ethics
- ▶ Offering networking opportunities through communities of practice
- ▶ Providing political action tools
- ▶ Disseminating professional knowledge by publishing a professional journal, research syntheses, best practice guidelines, etc.

Examples of collaboration between regulatory bodies and professional associations that have successfully strengthened the profession in the public interest include:

- ▶ The adoption of the baccalaureate degree as the minimal entry-to-practice requirement for RNs. Here, the board of Canada's professional nursing association (CNA) set the national policy direction (1982), which provincial and territorial regulatory bodies enabled through regulatory changes.¹³
- ▶ The development and maintenance of a code of ethics for RNs. In this instance, CNA establishes and upholds a values base for the profession, which individual nurses and many regulatory organizations adopt for use (in whole or in part) in meeting ethical standards.
- ▶ In 2011, seven American midwifery organizations (representing professional associations and organizations responsible for education, certification and regulation) partnered formally to develop a response to the International Council of Midwives global vision, to strengthen the midwifery profession in the U.S. and to expand the delivery of high-quality care.¹⁴

Through complementary and collaborative relationships, nursing regulatory bodies and professional associations can continue to advance the profession and provide leadership to the profession while contributing to public protection and quality health outcomes in the public interest.

¹³ (CNA, 2013)

¹⁴ (Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education et al., 2013)

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