



Royal College
of Nursing

Definition of the Registered Nurse and The Principles of Nursing



Definition of the Registered Nurse

The RCN are currently developing a Professional Framework for Nursing. Underpinning this framework is a new definition of the Registered Nurse.

This is aligned to an update of the RCN Principles of Nursing, which reflects the change and complexity of health and care services.

Short version

Nursing is a safety critical profession founded on four pillars: clinical practice, education, research, and leadership¹.

Registered nurses use evidence-based knowledge, professional and clinical judgement to assess, plan, implement and evaluate high-quality person-centred nursing care.



Expanded version

Nursing is a safety critical profession founded on four pillars: clinical practice, education, research, and leadership¹.

Registered nurses use evidence-based knowledge, professional and clinical judgement to assess, plan, implement and evaluate high-quality person-centred nursing care.

The work of registered nurses consists of many specialised and complex interventions. Their vigilance is critical to the safety of people, the prevention of avoidable harm and the management of risks regardless of the location or situation.

Compassionate leadership is central to the provision and co-ordination of nursing care and informed by its values, integrity and professional knowledge. Responsibility includes leading the integration of emotional, physical, organisational, and cognitive nursing work to meet the needs of people, organisations, systems, and populations.

Registered nurses are decision makers. They use clinical judgement and problem-solving skills to manage and co-ordinate the complexity of health and social care systems to ensure people and their families are enabled to improve, maintain, or recover health by adapting, coping, and returning to live lives of the best quality, or to experience a dignified death. They have high levels of autonomy within nursing and multi professional teams, and they delegate² to others in line with the NMC code.

Whilst this is the definition of the registered nurse, the role and valuable contribution of the nursing support workforce is recognised and reflected in the revised 'Principles of Nursing' which are applicable across the nursing workforce.

1. The leadership pillar for some nurses will include management responsibilities.
2. [rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/Accountability-and-delegation](https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/Accountability-and-delegation)

The Principles of Nursing

The Principles of Nursing are applicable across the nursing workforce. They describe what everyone can expect in the delivery of safe and effective nursing care. For registrants they are mapped to the NMC Code.

Principle A:

Nursing staff behave in a professional and ethical manner. They provide compassionate care recognising the diversity of each person and their cultural needs. They champion inclusivity and inclusion and lead by example through being culturally competent in increasingly diverse ways of communicating with people in their care. Nursing staff report or record all incidents of potential discrimination, bullying or harassment.

NMC code: 1



Principle B:

Nursing staff have a duty of care and are accountable for their practice under the NMC code. They support informed and transparent decision making for people in their health choices as well as advocating for those who are unable to make those decisions or unable to consent. Nursing staff enhance safeguarding across all populations in line with guidance from regulatory and professional bodies and acting in line with the nursing profession's ethics and values.

NMC code: 1,3



Principle C:

Nursing staff manage risk and safety in all health and social care settings. Duty of candour allows for openness and honesty around care and treatment and ensures nursing staff are acting in each individual's best interest. The RCN *Nursing Workforce Standards* provide guidance for ensuring staff and patient safety and wellbeing.

NMC code: 1,2,3



Principle D:

Nursing staff work in teams to provide evidence-based, person-centred care. Engagement with other health and social care professionals, the voluntary sector, service users, families and carers is imperative to ensure clear communication and shared decision making. This will assist people in making informed choices around their care and treatment and safeguard those who are unable to make those choices.

NMC code: 1,2,3



The Principles of Nursing

Principle E:

Nursing staff are instrumental in ensuring clear communication at all levels in all health and social care settings. Digital health and digital literacy are all increasingly central to people's health support network. Nursing staff have the responsibility to handle all data and people's information sensitively, confidentially, and competently in line with GDPR.

NMC code: 3



Principle F:

Nursing staff undertake evidence-based learning to enhance their skills and knowledge. Reflective practice, continuing education, personal and professional development ensures a well informed and educated workforce. This provides insightful and skilled nursing staff who can support individuals in their care and decision making, while advancing their own clinical practice.

NMC code: 2,3,4



Principle G:

Nursing staff provide high quality, co-ordinated and sustainable treatment for people in their care. Working closely with other health and social care professionals and promoting interprofessional learning allows better management of work and resources to provide the optimal outcomes for people using evidence-based standards. They consider the environmental, financial and social implications of decisions affecting care. They promote health and advocate to reduce inequalities across system wide service provision.

NMC code: 2,3,4



Principle H:

Nursing staff are responsible for compassionate leadership and help shape organisational cultures. They participate in the transformation of services, influencing through innovation, policy, and personal impact. They work flexibly, continuously prioritise and manage conflict that impacts on delivering effective interagency or interprofessional care.

NMC code: 4



The term 'Nursing staff' is inclusive and includes the nursing support workforce who work with the registered nurse to support the provision of nursing care. This term, as defined in the RCN *Nursing Workforce Standards* encompasses a wide range of roles and titles which may include nursing associate (England only), assistant practitioner, health care assistant, health care support worker and nursing assistant,

For registrants the principles are mapped to the **Nursing and Midwifery Council code of conduct** and the RCN **Nursing Workforce Standards** (2021).



www.rcn.org.uk/nursingpractice

