



*At the Heart of Your Career*

# **VA Nurse Qualification Standard**

**Developed by:  
the VISN NPSB Consultants  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration**

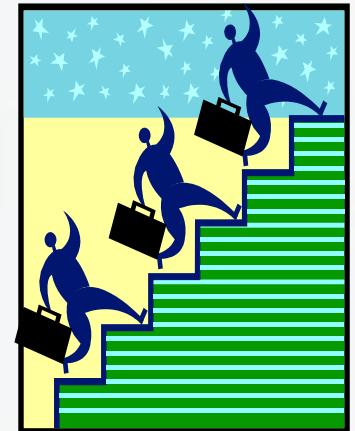
**Revised: September 2019**



# Nurse Qualification Standard

**The VA Nurse Qualification Standard is a set of regulations in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G6.**

**The Qualification Standard illustrates the expected totality of professional performance at each grade/level with progression in nursing practice.**





# **Nurse Qualification Standard**

**(Cont.)**

**Modeled after the 1991 ANA *Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice*. These are considered the Core Competencies of professional practice for every RN. The complexity increases as the RN progresses professionally.**

**The ANA *Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice* delineates the professional practice of all registered nurses engaged in clinical practice regardless of setting.**



# ***ANA Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice***

**The Standards of Care describe a competent level of nursing care as demonstrated by the nursing process:**

- Standard I.      Assessment**
- Standard II.     Diagnosis**
- Standard III.    Outcome Identification**
- Standard IV.     Planning**
- Standard V.      Implementation**
- Standard VI.     Evaluation**



# ***ANA Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice (Cont.)***

**The Standards of Professional Performance describe a competent level of behavior in the professional role:**

- Standard I. Quality of Care**
- Standard II. Performance Appraisal**
- Standard III. Education**
- Standard IV. Collegiality**
- Standard V. Ethics**
- Standard VI. Collaboration**
- Standard VII. Research**
- Standard VIII. Resource Utilization**



# **Nurse Qualification Standard**

**(Cont.)**

- ◆ **The VA Nurse Qualification Standard has four Practice Dimensions (all Dimensions must be met each year at current Grade level).**
- ◆ **Each Grade/level has a general statement of Scope.**
- ◆ **Each Grade/level has educational requirements.**
- ◆ **Current Qualification Standard became effective on March 17, 2009.**



# Nurse Qualification Standard

(Cont.)

**Includes four components:**

- **Educational Requirements**
- **Years of RN Experience**
- **Four (4) Dimensions of Nursing Practice:  
Practice, Professional Development, Collaboration,  
Scientific Inquiry**  
*(VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G6)*
- **Criteria for Consideration of Advancements**  
*(VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4)*



# Nurse Qualification Standard

(Cont.)

## ▪ Criteria for Consideration of Advancements

*(VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4)*

Can see the RN' s  
practice in the  
Dimensions of  
Practice and  
Scientific Inquiry

- Have improved the effectiveness of patient care through the use of more complex skills and application of scholarly knowledge to practice;

Can see the RN' s  
practice in the  
Dimensions of  
Practice and  
Professional  
Development

- Have assumed greater responsibility for the improvement of patient care;

Can see the RN' s  
practice in the  
Dimensions of  
Practice and  
Professional  
Development

- Have made steady progress toward professional goals for the improvement of patient care; **and**





# Nurse Qualification Standard

(Cont.)

- **Criteria for Consideration of Advancements (Cont.)**  
*(VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4)*
  - **Have demonstrated the ability to perform at the level of professional nursing practice as required in the qualification standard for appointment to the grade to which the RN is being considered for promotion to a higher grade level or advancement within the grade.**

**All four “Criteria for Consideration” must be met for promotion. If you write to the Dimensions of Practice, you will address the Criteria for Consideration of Advancements.**



# **Nurse Qualification Standard**

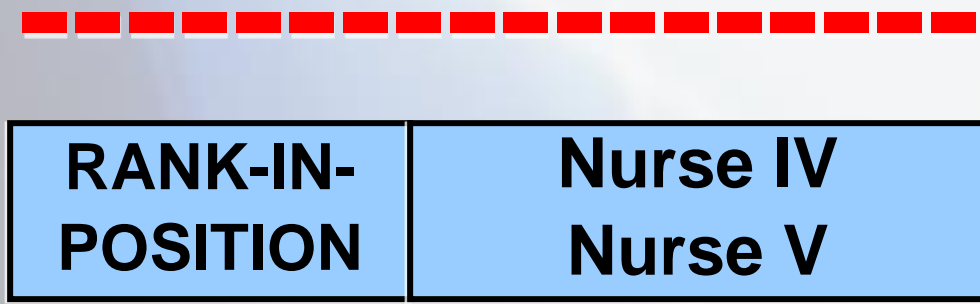
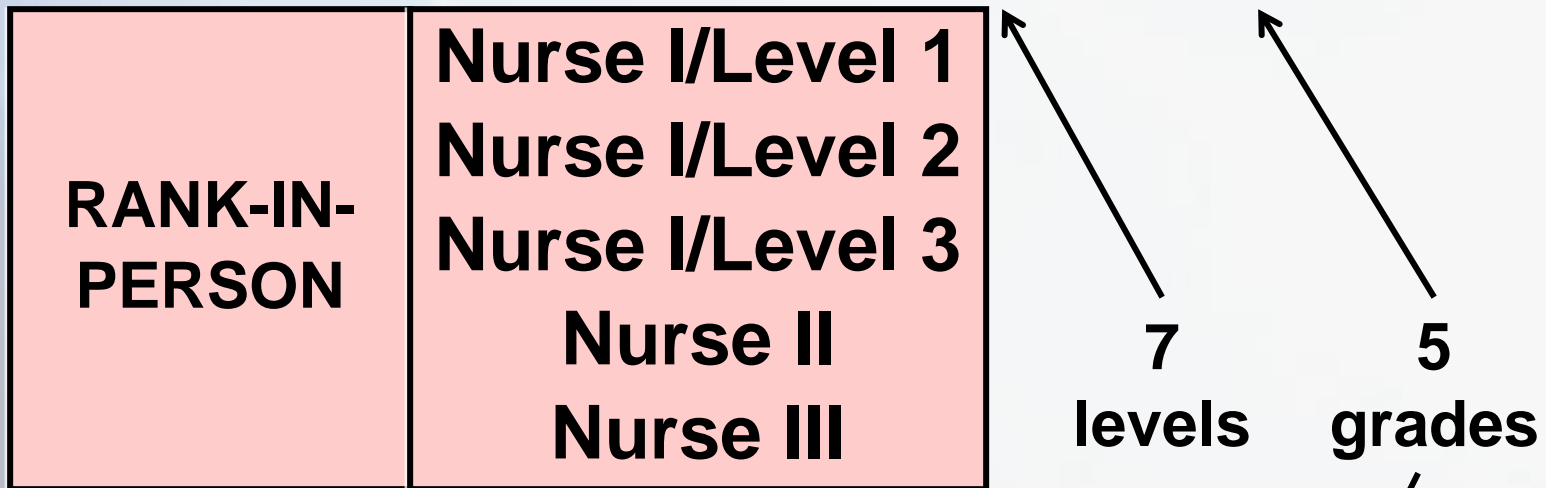
**(Cont.)**

**The VA Nurse Qualification Standard exists to support VA RNs to:**

- ❖ Provide high quality care to Veterans in range of roles and settings.**
- ❖ Evolve professionally as the VA transforms.**
- ❖ Provide a basis for peer review process (NPSB) to be appointed, retained, promoted, and rewarded.**



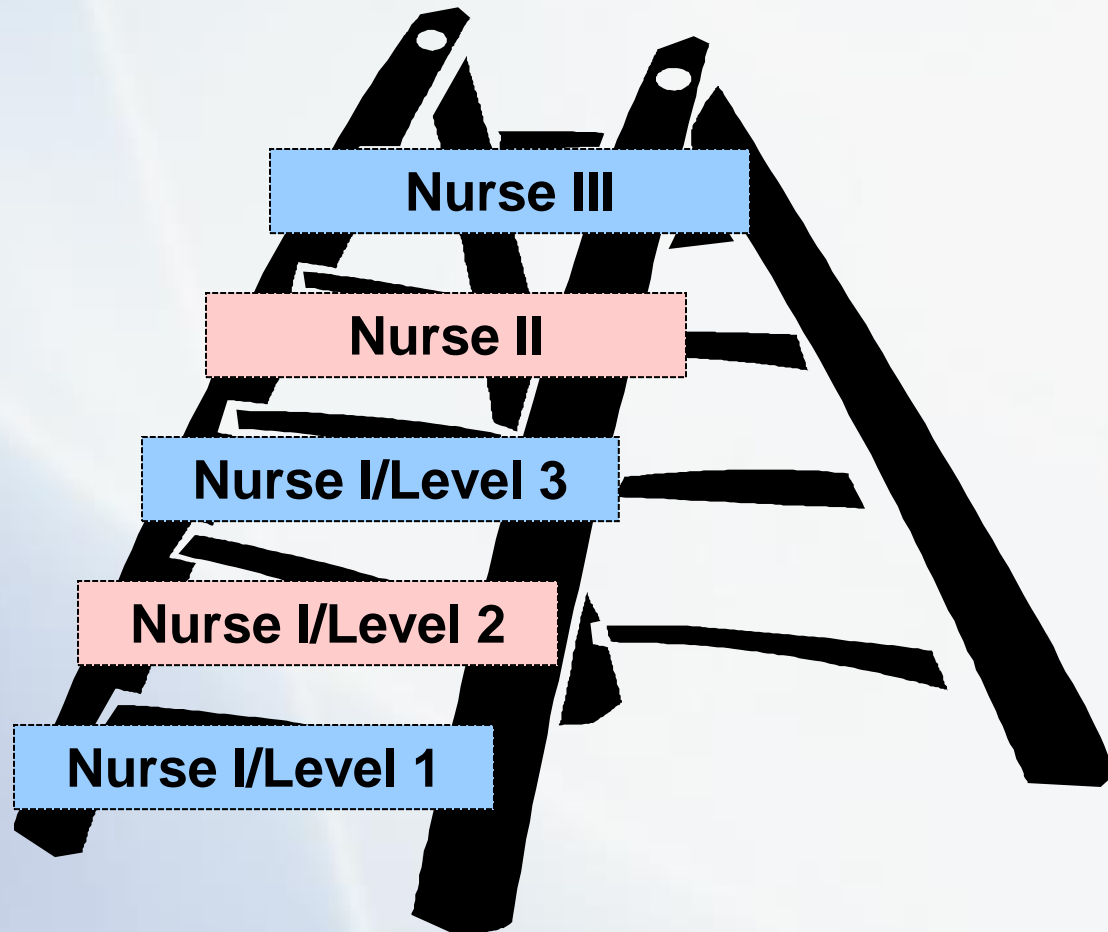
# Grades and Levels in VA Nursing



A nurse attains NIV or NV only by applying for an established NIV or NV position.

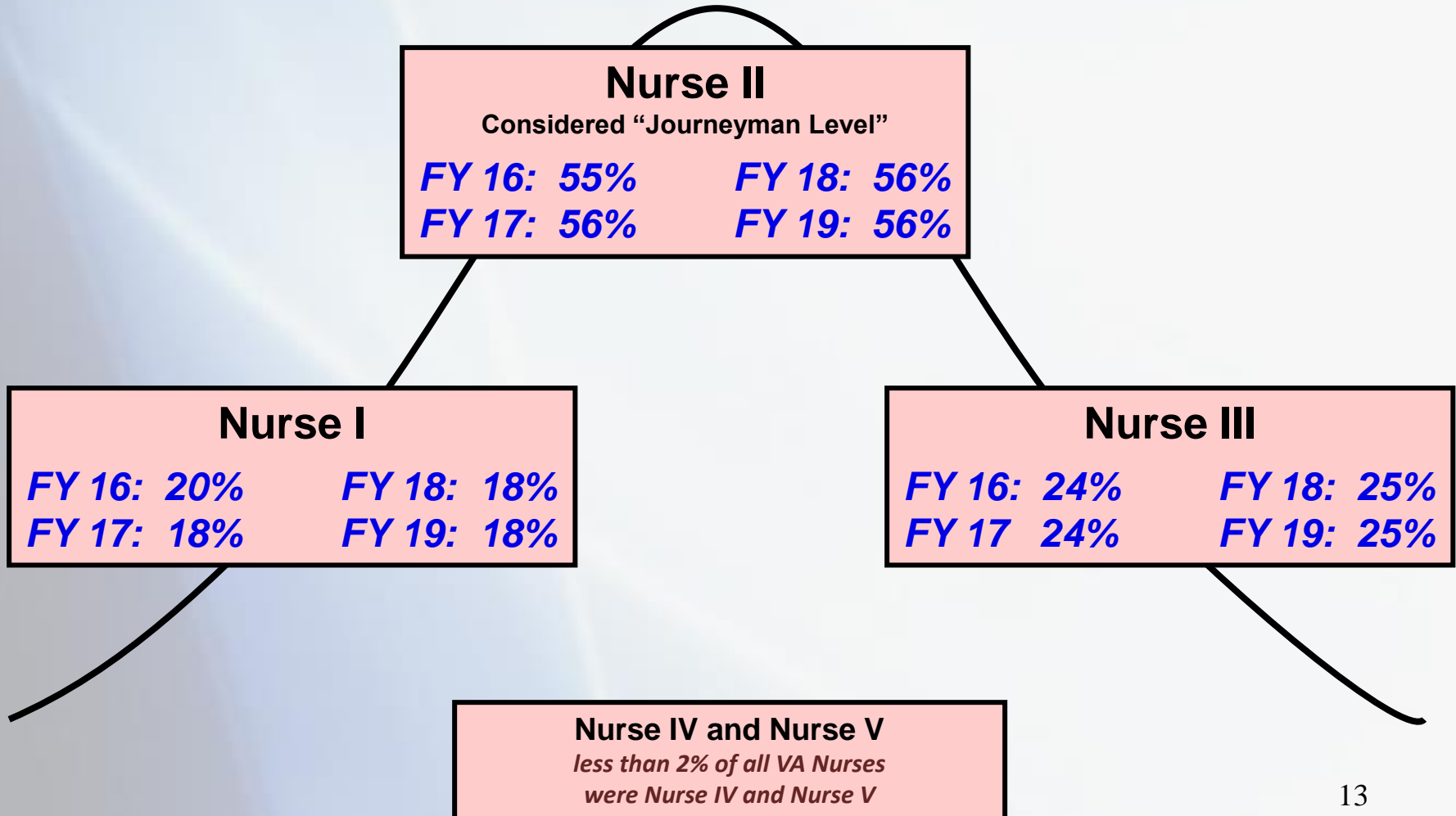


# VA Nursing's "Career Ladder"





# National Distribution of Grades: All VA Nurses





# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
Nurse I / Level 1	Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) or Diploma in Nursing	None
GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
Nurse I / Level 2	Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)	None
	Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma	
	ADN or Diploma	Approx 1 year



# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
Nurse I / Level 3	Master's degree in Nursing or in a related field with a BSN or Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma	None
	MSN from bridge program; no BSN required when a bridge graduate	
	BSN	Approx 1 - 2 years
	Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma	
	ADN or Diploma	Approx 2 - 3 years



# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
Nurse II	<b>Doctoral degree in Nursing or in a related field (and meets basic requirements for appointment)</b>	<b>None</b>
	<b>Master's degree in Nursing or in a related field with a BSN or Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma</b>	<b>Approx 1 - 2 years</b>
	<b>MSN from bridge program; no BSN required when a bridge graduate</b>	
	<b>BSN</b>	<b>Approx 2 - 3 years</b>
	<b>Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma</b>	





# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
Nurse III	Doctoral degree in Nursing or in a related field	Approx 2 - 3 years
	Master's degree in Nursing or in a related field with a BSN or Bachelor's degree in a related field with ADN or Diploma	
	MSN from bridge program; no BSN required when a bridge graduate	

**NOTE:** It is possible to attain Nurse III with an ADN or Diploma, a Bachelor's degree in a related field, and a Master's degree in a related field.



# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
<b>Nurse IV</b>  <i>(rank-in-position)</i>	<b>Doctoral degree in Nursing or in a related field</b>	<b>Approx 3 - 4 years</b>
	<b>Master's degree in Nursing or in a related field with a BSN <i>(BSN required for Nurse IV)</i></b>	<b>Approx 4 - 5 years</b>
	<b>MSN from bridge program; no BSN required</b>	<b>Approx 4 - 5 years</b>



# Education and Experience

GRADE	EDUCATION	TOTAL RN EXPERIENCE
<b>Nurse V</b>  <i>(rank-in-position)</i>	Doctoral degree in Nursing ( <i>preferred</i> ) or in a related field	Approx 4 - 5 years
	Master's degree in Nursing or in a related field with a BSN <b>(BSN required for Nurse V)</b>	Approx 5 - 6 years
	MSN from bridge program; no BSN required	Approx 5 - 6 years

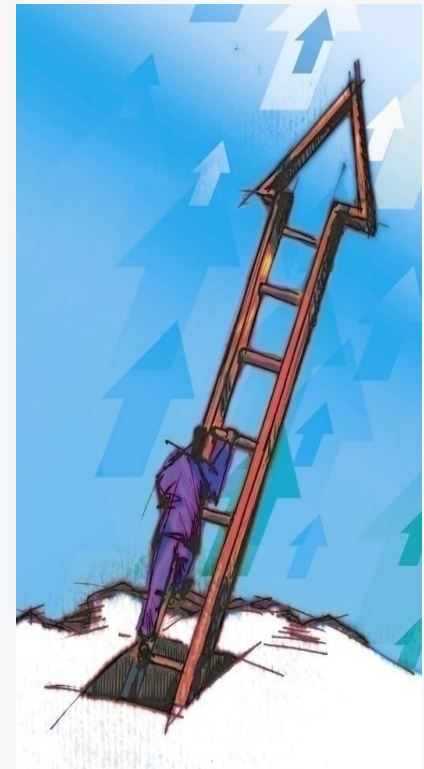


## Levels of Practice

**An RN must advance/promote sequentially through each grade/level established at Appointment, Nurse I through Nurse III.**

**This means that an RN cannot “skip” a grade from Nurse I through Nurse III because **Nurse I thru Nurse III is rank-in-person.****

**Example: RN appointed at Nurse I/Level 2 cannot be promoted to Nurse III until he/she has first been promoted to Nurse I/Level 3 and then Nurse II.**





## Levels of Practice (Cont.)

**However an RN at any grade can apply and be selected for a Nurse IV or Nurse V position, provided they meet the education and years of experience for these grades because **Nurse IV and Nurse V is rank-in-position.****

**Example: An RN at Nurse II can apply for and be selected for a Nurse IV position, provided the RN meets the education requirements and the years of experience.**





## Critical Distinctions in Levels of Practice

**Nurse I:** **Individual** growth and development in clinical practice to increasing levels of self direction. **“It’s all about me!”**



**Nurse II:** **Unit** level contributions and leadership. **“It’s all about us.”**



**Nurse III:** **Sustained leadership** resulting in **program** contributions and outcomes at the **unit level and beyond.**





# Scope of Nurse I / Level 1

Delivers **fundamental knowledge-based care** to assigned clients while **developing technical skills**.

(VA Handbook 5005)

- New graduate practice focused on safe direct care of a few patients with fundamental, technical skill acquisition and development.
- Getting oriented to the VA and to nursing.
- Requires frequent oversight.
- Experiencing real-world application of the nursing process.
- Limited application of critical thinking skills.
- Depends on rules to guide practice.
- Inability to use discretionary judgment.
- Difficulty with prioritizing.



## Scope of Nurse I / Level 2

Demonstrates **integration of** bio-psychosocial **concepts**, cognitive skills, and technically **competent practice** in providing care to clients with basic or complex needs.  
(VA Handbook 5005)

- Gaining confidence, can do more than basics.
- Perfecting basic skills.
- Can note meaningful aspects of a situation.
- Beginning to use guidelines and recognize patterns.
- Needs help setting priorities.
- Loses sight of the “big picture.”
- Learning the language of nursing and is beginning to integrate nursing concepts.





## **Scope of Nurse I / Level 2 (Cont.)**

- **Increasing independence with periodic oversight by manager or charge nurse.**
- **Beginning to direct others. Might begin serving as team leader and precept new LPN or nursing assistant, sharing his/her knowledge.**



## Scope of Nurse I / Level 3

Demonstrates proficiency in practice based on **conscious and deliberate planning. Self-directed** in goal setting for managing complex client situations.  
(VA Handbook 5005)

- Organized and efficient.
- Feeling of mastery.
- Still needs to build speed and flexibility (compared with “proficient” nurse).
- Self-directed, technically skilled, provides care to complex patients; beginning to look beyond just their daily assignment to concerns and issues occurring on the unit.
- Can set goals; manage complex patient situations.
- Practice includes guiding and directing others who provide care. Provides feedback to manager.



## **Scope of Nurse I / Level 3 (Cont.)**

- **Precept or assist with precepting new RN.**
- **Has developed skills required for competent performance in an emergent situation; however, competent performance may be interrupted when the nurse is overwhelmed by multiple tasks and/or pressures of leadership.**
- **Is developing a grasp of the resources available in the interdisciplinary team but may have difficulty accessing or maximizing these resources especially in an emergency.**
- **Beginning to develop charge nurse responsibilities.**



# Scope of Nurse II

Demonstrates **leadership** in delivering and improving holistic care through **collaborative strategies** with others. (VA Handbook 5005)

- Grasps the whole picture.
- Practice affects unit, team, or work group.
- Guided by experience. No longer just following the rules.
- Sensitive to nuances; aware of patterns.
- Concepts of leadership emerging.
- Can focus in on problems.
- Can really see that there are emerging issues on the unit that need to be addressed.
- Demonstrates the ability to identify an issue, analyze it, and develop and implement interventions.



## **Scope of Nurse II (Cont.)**

- **Picks up on changes in patient condition and acts quickly and appropriately.**
- **Organization for patient care is automatic and dynamic.**
- **Looks for opportunities to improve practice or functions at the unit level for a group of patients, using group process to accomplish this, for example, organizing, leading, or facilitating interdisciplinary team meetings.**



## Scope of Nurse III

**Executes** position responsibilities that demonstrate **leadership, experience,** and creative approaches to **management of complex patient care.**

(VA Handbook 5005)

Nurse III must demonstrate performance and leadership that is broad enough to improve the care for a group of patients. The Nurse III is responsible for the documented outcomes at the program or service level. Program or service level outcomes must be broad and complex and can be demonstrated at any organizational level within a facility, VISN, or VACO.



## **Scope of Nurse III (Cont.)**

**In order to be considered for appointment or promotion to Nurse III, outcomes must be documented. Meeting the Practice dimension involves incorporating and implementing the requirements of the other qualification standards, including:**

**(a) Leading and organizing delivery of care to assure continuity of care and peer accountability for practice, including access to care and discharge planning.**

**(b) Using advanced clinical knowledge/judgment to promote staff involvement in planning, decision making and evaluating outcomes.**



## **Scope of Nurse III (Cont.)**

- (c) Functioning as an expert in clinical practice and/or in areas related to the assigned roles and responsibilities.**
- (d) Systematically evaluating current practice, and formulating outcomes for groups of patients and/or organizational processes within area of expertise.**
- (e) Guiding, developing and supporting staff from a leadership perspective.**
- (f) Using professional standards of care, scientific evidence and practice to evaluate programs and/or service activities.**





## Scope of Nurse III (Cont.)

- **Intuitive grasp of the situation.**
- **Deep understanding of the problem.**
- **Can't always explain – just “knows.”**
- **Reverts to analytical thinking when events are not expected.**
- **Has the skills required for immediate, automatic, and seamless performance in an emergent situation.**
- **Has confidence in own abilities and is usually calm in the face of clinical emergencies.**
- **Creates order in the midst of a chaotic clinical episode.**
- **Practice affects programs, service, or medical center level, with clear outcomes, that improves care for a group of patients.**



## Scope of Nurse III (Cont.)

- **Demonstrates leadership that is sustainable regardless of role.**
- **Incorporates professional standards of care and implements broad-reaching evidence-based change.**
- **Actively leads groups and takes the lead in practice changes.**
- **Is not just assigned to a system-wide committee and sits passively in the meetings. Very interactive; participates and leads subgroups, brings ideas into the committee, takes the lead for change.**
- **Very active, well-known, and easily identifiable for expertise.**



# **Dimensions of Nursing Practice and Career Paths**



# The Dimensions of Nursing Practice

<b>DIMENSION</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>
<b>Practice</b>	<b>Practice, Ethics, Resource Utilization</b>
<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>Performance, Education/Career Development</b>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Collegiality, Collaboration</b>
<b>Scientific Inquiry</b>	<b>Quality of Care, Research</b>



# Four Career Paths

CAREER PATH	ROLES
<b>Clinical</b>	<b>Direct Care Nurse, Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL)</b>
<b>Supervisory</b>	<b>Nurse Manager, Assistant Nurse Manager, Nurse Supervisor/Coordinator</b>
<b>Advanced Practice</b>	<b>Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Certified Nurse Practitioner (NP) Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM)</b>
<b>Consultant</b>	<b>All other roles not specifically listed above, including: Education, Recruiting, Quality Management, Research, Utilization Management, Informatics, Infection Control, etc.</b>



# Four Career Paths

- **The Qualification Standards have now been applied to four Career Paths.**
- **The Career Paths support nursing in diversified environments of practice.**
- **RNs can move seamlessly between Career Paths as the shift among diverse nursing roles.**
- **The Qualification Standards for each of the Dimensions are the same in all four Career Paths.**



## **Four Career Paths (Cont.)**

- **Outcome examples used to demonstrate meeting the Dimensions will be specific to the RN's Career Path and position.**
- **The Career Path Workbooks have examples to assist the RN in applying the standards to his/her role.**



## Dimension: Practice

- **The effective use of the nursing process to make practice decisions in an ethical manner in varied practice settings.**
- **Considers factors related to safety, effectiveness, and cost in planning and delivering care.**
- **4 realms of resources: Human, Information, Fiscal, and Materiel.**





# Dimension: Practice

## ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses

- (1) The nurse, in all professional relationships, practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and uniqueness of every individual, unrestricted by considerations of social or economic status, personal attributes, or the nature of health problems.**
- (2) The nurses' primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, or community.**
- (3) The nurse promotes, advocate for, and strives to protect the health, safety, and rights of the patient.**



# Dimension: Practice

## **ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (Cont.)**

**(4) The nurse is responsible and accountable for individual nursing practice and determines the appropriate delegation of tasks consistent with the nurse's obligation to provide optimum patient care.**

**(5) The nurse owes the same duties to self as others, including the responsibility to preserve integrity and safety, to maintain competence, and to continue personal and professional growth.**



# Dimension: Practice

## **ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (Cont.)**

**(6) The nurse participates in establishing, maintaining, and improving healthcare environments and conditions of employment conducive to the provisions of quality health care and consistent with the values of the professional through individual and collective action.**

**(7) The nurse participates in the advancement of the profession through contributions to practice, education, administration, and knowledge development.**



# Dimension: Practice

## **ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (Cont.)**

**(8) The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public in promoting community, national, and international efforts to meet health needs.**

**(9) The profession of nursing, as represented by association and their members, is responsible for articulating nursing values, for maintaining the integrity of the profession and its practice, and for shaping social policy.**



# Dimension: Practice

GRADE	CAREER PATH	EXAMPLES (from Career Path Workbook)
NI/L2	Clinical	<p>Recognizes when patient self-determination is threatened</p> <p>Makes patient care assignments that reflect use of available staff and priority care needs</p>
NI/L3	Clinical	<p>Orients new staff</p> <p>Gives directions to others to practice patient safety initiatives</p>
NII	Clinical	<p>Describes a patient care situation that shows shared expertise on behalf of all patients in the practice area</p>
NIII	Clinical	<p>Developed a program-wide performance improvement project to increase staff compliance with hand hygiene</p>



## **Dimension: Professional Development**

- **Seeks learning opportunities for self and others.**
- **Evaluates his/her own nursing practice and the performance of others.**



# Dimension: Professional Development

GRADE	CAREER PATH	EXAMPLES (from Career Path Workbook)
NI/L2	Clinical	<p>Creates a professional development plan with feedback received from annual proficiency</p> <p>Describes discussion with experts about patient care problem</p>
NI/L3	Clinical	<p>Serves as a service council member</p> <p>Precepts new staff or students</p>
NII	Consultant	<p>Acquires knowledge and skills appropriate to the specialty area, practice setting, and role or situation</p>
NIII	Advanced Practice	<p>Identifies learning needs, plans and provides formal and informal education to nursing personnel on specialty-related area and performance improvement</p>



## **Dimension: Collaboration**

- **Creates an atmosphere in which nurses collaborate and build professional relationships with patients, families, and colleagues in the interdisciplinary team.**
- **Provides opportunities for nurses to share knowledge through coaching and mentoring and contributing to the professional development of others.**





# Dimension: Collaboration

GRADE	CAREER PATH	EXAMPLES (from Career Path Workbook)
NI/L2	Clinical	Documentation of situations where assistance and support were provided to others
NI/L3	Clinical	Describes care plan demonstrating care coordination for continuity between different levels of service for patient / family
NII	Supervisory	Partners with other disciplines to enhance the delivery of patient care through interdisciplinary activities
NIII	Consultant	Chair of a VISN level or national level committee or task force



## **Dimension: Scientific Inquiry**

- **The extent to which the RN systematically evaluates and improves the quality and effectiveness of nursing practice and health care delivery based on research.**



# Dimension: Scientific Inquiry

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>CAREER PATH</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b> (from Career Path Workbook)
<b>NI/L2</b>	<b>Clinical</b>	Participates in journal club  Able to identify and utilize accepted institutional standards of care and standards of practice
<b>NI/L3</b>	<b>Clinical</b>	Identifies a practice problem for a performance improvement project in consultation with the nurse manager
<b>NII</b>	<b>Advanced Practice</b>	Reads and evaluates research-based literature related to identified problems in area of specialty.
<b>NIII</b>	<b>Supervisory</b>	Provides leadership as a Co-Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator in a formal research project.



# References

**VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G6**

**VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4**

**VACO Office Of Nursing Services:**

**<http://vaww.va.gov/NURSING/qualificationstandards.asp>**

**ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses**

**Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice  
(ANA)**