

Alliance for Nursing Accreditation
Agenda Item – March 16, 2004
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
&
National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties

PROPOSAL: To create a national forum to develop a consensus statement on the education, certification, and regulation of advanced practice nurses. This consensus also would address issues related to specialization/subspecialization in advanced practice and mechanisms that would allow and support evolutionary growth in the discipline of nursing while assuring accountable practice.

PURPOSE: To provide a set of uniform expectations that can be used by educators, credentialers, and employers to assure access to high quality, effective advanced practice nurses (APRNs).

BACKGROUND:

For over a decade, most states have had an established mechanism for recognizing APRNs that includes standards for educational preparation and, in most instances, a requirement that the APRN has acquired national certification. In recent years, a great deal of discussion has occurred around issues related to definitions of appropriate roles for advanced practice in nursing, definitions of specialization/subspecialization, requirements for practice, and evolutionary changes in this aspect of professional nursing. A good deal of controversy has arisen regarding the definition of APRN practice and how alternate views of this definition could negatively affect the discipline.

There is wide divergence of opinion regarding appropriate scopes of practice and specialization in that practice. Current proposed standards from the NCSBN, and others, seek to limit authority to practice to individuals within very defined areas of knowledge, and propose limits on the evolution of new, specialized roles. In contrast, other clinicians have advocated for a very loosely constructed view of how the focus of practice could evolve and how APRNs should be granted authority to practice. Application of a very narrow definition of appropriate scopes of practice does not allow for the evolution of practice and the emergence of new scopes of practice to meet significant clinical care needs. However, if definitions of scopes of practice are too narrowly or loosely defined, neither of these approaches will meet the needs of the health care system and assure patient safety.

A consensus statement on how practice scopes evolve, how to define the distinction between specialization and subspecialization, and how to resolve the need for evolution in the credentialing process must be reached. This will provide clarity to the consumer and the employer regarding the expertise held by an APRN and how this expertise can be appropriately validated. Any efforts to develop this consensus must take into account the political implications

of individual group definitions or actions and their potential to create challenges or harm to the authority of other APRNs.

Development of a community-wide consensus on these issues will provide a framework for future efforts to educate, employ, and credential APRNs.