

Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL[®])

The CNL is the first new nursing role introduced into the U.S. healthcare system in 35 years. Developed by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in collaboration with leaders from the education and practice arenas, this unique role was created to reduce the fragmentation that has developed in health care across the nation during the past decades.

In practice, CNLs oversee the care coordination for patients, assess risks, develop quality improvement strategies, facilitate team communication, and implement evidence-based solutions at the unit level. The CNL prepares nurses for clinical leadership in all healthcare systems and practice settings. Practice sites across the country are restructuring their systems to engage skilled clinicians in outcomes-based practice. This new role breaks down silos as it requires communication, planning, and interaction among the health care team including other clinicians, clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, physicians, pharmacists, and social workers.

The CNL actively provides direct patient care in complex situations. CNLs are at the bedside analyzing data to improve patient safety while being accountable for care outcomes. The role is not administrative or management. This advanced clinician puts evidence-based practice into action to ensure that patients benefit from the latest innovations in care delivery.

The responsibility of the CNL to design, implement, and evaluate nursing care, results in protecting the patient/consumer. In tandem with the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*, the CNL role is transforming the health care system by providing quality care while containing costs. According to recent data, CNLs are improving care outcomes, reducing hospital readmissions, and realizing sizable cost-savings. (Ott et al., 2009; Hix, McKeon & Walter, 2009).

The CNL represents change within the health care system and prepares nurses as change agents. Several reports have promoted health care reform through the implementation of the CNL role. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recently recognized the CNL in the *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* (2010) as being innovative. The Joint Commission Report, *Health Care at the Crossroads: Guiding Principles for the Development of the Hospital of the Future* (2008), featured the CNL role as a response to the complexity of the healthcare system.

Earning the CNL designation requires graduation from a master's degree or past-master's certificate program, Registered Nurse (RN) licensure, and successful completion of the CNL certification examination. Launched in 2007, the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC) manages the CNL Certification Program. To date, there are more than 1,000 CNLs and 150 schools of nursing offering a CNL education program.

References

Hix, C. McKeon L. & Walter, S. (2009, February). Clinical nurse leader impact on clinical Microsystems outcomes, *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 39(2), 71-76.

Institute of Medicine (2010). *Future of nursing: leading change, advancing health*. Washington, DC; National Academies of Press.

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (2008). *Health care at the crossroads: guiding principles for the development of the hospital of the future*. Chicago: Author.

Ott, K.M., Haddock, K.S., Fos, S.E., Shinn, J.K., Walters, S.E., Hardon, J.W., Durrand, K. & Harris, J.L. (2009, November-December). The Clinical Nurse Leader: Impact on practice outcomes in the Veterans Health Administration, *Nursing Economics*, 27(6), 363-370, 383.

Rosseter, R. (2010, January). Is the clinical nurse leader role for you? *NSNA Imprint*. 39-41.

Contact Information

Tracy Lofty, MSA, CAE, Director, Commission on Nurse Certification
tlofty@aacn.nche.edu; www.aacn.nche.edu/CNC; 202-463-6930, ext. 242

Joan Stanley, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAAN, Senior Director of Education Policy, AACN
jstanley@aacn.nche.edu; www.aacn.nche.edu/CNL; 202-463-6930, ext. 254