



HPNA Position Statement
Value of the Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse in Palliative Care

Background

The licensed practical nurse (LPN), also called license vocational nurse (LVN), is a valuable member of the palliative nursing community and clinical team. LP/VNs provide safe, high-quality nursing care consistent with their education, under the direction of a registered nurse (RN) or other healthcare professional.¹ LP/VNs significantly contribute to palliative nursing care and positive outcomes for patients with serious or life-threatening illness across all healthcare settings.

The hospice and palliative LP/VN practices within the guidelines of individual state boards of nursing and delivers evidence-based practice that addresses the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual needs of patients and their families.^{2,3} This supports a shared and collaborative process that promotes comfort and a sense of well-being to patients and families experiencing serious or life-threatening illness.

The LP/VN assists the RN by providing the necessary treatments, education, and documentation consistent with the plan of care. An integral member of the interdisciplinary team who provides excellent information to the team members ultimately responsible for the plan of care, the LP/VN monitors symptoms and changes, and reports these changes to the RN in charge of the patient’s care. In essence, the RN is responsible for the act of assessment and the LP/VN is responsible for observing, monitoring, and reporting his or her observations.³

Nursing is a practice discipline where competence resides in the use of specific knowledge, skills, and clinical judgment to meet patients and families healthcare needs.⁴ The American Nurses Association defines nursing as, “The protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities and populations.”¹

Historically, the nursing profession experienced periods of both staffing oversupply and staffing undersupply. In periods of short supply, efforts to create a nurse extender position to perform some of the work typically done by the RN

precipitated the development of role of the LP/VN.⁵ The LP/VN represents the established entry into the nursing profession.² With advances in medical technology and extended lifespans, demand for the LP/VN is expected to increase. In 2010, there were approximately 752,300 LP/VNs in the United States. Staffing needs are expected to increase to 917,000 by 2020.⁶

Position Statement

- Licensed practical/vocational nurses are a valuable member of the team and assist the professional nurse in providing nursing care that is critical in achieving the palliative care goals of patients, families, and communities.
- Nurse educators must develop education programs that support clinical competence, translate across practice settings, and are grounded in evidence-based curriculum.
- Licensed practical/vocational nurses should practice nursing to the full extent of their education and training, within the scope of their state-specific nurse practice act.
- Organizations need to clearly understand the differences and similarities between licensed practical/vocation nurse and registered nurse education, as well as the nursing functions that remain the responsibility of the registered nurse.
- Persons developing policies, procedures, and protocols must ensure the clinical practice of the licensed practical/vocation nurse in palliative care is consistent with individual state nurse practice acts and the *Statement on the Scope and Standards of Hospice and Palliative Licensed Practice/Vocational Nursing Practice*, and *Professional Competencies for the Hospice and Palliative Licensed Practice/Vocational Nurse*.

Definition of Terms

Palliative care: Patient and family-centered care that optimizes quality of life by anticipating, preventing, and treating suffering. Palliative care throughout the continuum of illness involves addressing physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual needs and to facilitate patient autonomy, access to information, and choice.^{7, p. 9}

Serious or life-threatening illnesses: A broad range of diagnostic categories that occur in all populations of patients at all ages (neonates, children, adolescents, and adults) characterized by the following: an individual's daily functioning is adversely affected; stabilization of the condition is unlikely; quality of life is diminished; life expectancy is reduced; and/or the condition and its treatment pose significant burdens.^{7, p. 8-9}

Evidence-based practice: The process of integrating the best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values to produce good clinical decision-making. Evidence-based nursing requires clinicians to consider various aspects of the patient's clinical situation, as well as the setting and circumstance in which care is being delivered.⁸

Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse: This includes the performance of authorized acts of nursing which utilize specialized skills and knowledge that meet the health needs of people in a variety of settings under the direction of qualified health professionals.² Education and training surrounding licensed practical or vocational nursing requires 7 to 24 months post high school formal training through an accredited program as well as supervised clinical instruction that focuses on the fundamental aspects of nursing care. Once the training is complete, the graduate is required to pass a licensing examination for "practical nursing."^{2,9}

Nursing: The protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations.¹⁰

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