



HPNA Position Statement **Value of Advanced Practice Nurse in Palliative Care**

Background

This document is a revision of the 2001 position statement developed by nurse leaders in the field under the sponsorship of *Promoting Excellence in End-of-Life Care* and the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*.¹

America has moved into the 21st century and the healthcare crisis surrounding how people die continues. At the beginning of the 20th century, people died at younger ages of acute illnesses, in the home setting cared for by family and friends. By comparison, Americans now live longer. However, this longer life span often means living with chronic illness that ultimately leads to declining quality of life and increasing healthcare utilization and cost, as health problems worsen. The burden on families grows as they cope with the demands of caregiving and complex healthcare regimens. Although most Americans state they would like to die at home, more often than not, death now occurs in hospitals and nursing homes.² Access to high quality palliative care can address this crisis in healthcare.³

The National Quality Forum's endorsement of a *National Framework and Preferred Practices for Palliative and Hospice Care Quality*, based in part on the 2004 National Consensus Project's [*Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care*](#), establishes both the standard for access to and provision of high quality palliative care.^{4,5} While these guidelines reflect a multidisciplinary interest and concern about improving care at the end of life, the nursing profession is particularly well suited to these efforts. Nurses, by virtue of their education and scope of practice, promote the principles of palliative care in all settings. The goal of palliative care is to achieve the best possible quality of life through relief of suffering, control of symptoms and restoration of functional capacity while remaining sensitive to the personal, cultural and religious values, beliefs and practices of patients and families.^{5,6} This is similar to the goal of nursing, to assist patients to attain, maintain or restore health or experience a dignified death.⁷

Nurses are essential providers in every practice setting where patients receive care and eventually die. Nursing is based in the principles of the biological, physical, behavioral and social sciences, and focuses on the diagnosis and management of human responses to actual and potential health problems.

Nurses employ critical thinking to assess the patient and apply the best available research and evidence in order to maximize quality of life across the life span.⁷ Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are uniquely qualified and positioned to address the myriad needs facing individuals with life-limiting, progressive illness. Although collaboration with other providers (e.g., physicians, social workers) must occur to attend to these vulnerable patients, APNs have the knowledge and clinical judgment to provide primary palliative care in all settings. APNs who have specialty preparation in palliative care through education and/or clinical practice function as palliative care experts.

The APN is situated to model optimal palliative care, not only to nursing colleagues, but also to all members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team and to assume leadership roles in education, practice, research and public policy arenas.^{7,8}

Position Statement

It is the position of the HPNA Board of Directors that Advanced Practice Nurses represent a valuable resource in national efforts to improve care and quality of life for all Americans and their families living with advanced, life-limiting illness and conditions. In order to maximize utilization of this resource and improve access to high quality palliative care, leaders in the clinical professions, nursing educators, health service providers, health care payers and public policy advocates are urged to continue to pursue the following actions

- PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS in nursing, medicine, hospice and palliative care are called on to support and further the APN role in palliative care.
- NURSING EDUCATORS must become knowledgeable about palliative care and expand
 - Continuing education to prepare and develop existing APNs in palliative care competencies across all settings
 - Integration of core palliative care competencies into the education of all APN students regardless of role or degree
 - Academic and clinical programs for APN students who intend to specialize in palliative care
- PAYERS OF HEALTH SERVICES are called on to recognize the specialty of palliative care and provide APNs with adequate and consistent compensation and reimbursement that is commensurate with APN scope of practice, authority and responsibility, regardless of practice setting, specialty/subspecialty.
- INDIVIDUAL STATE BOARDS OF NURSING are called on to work collaboratively to consistently recognize APN scopes of practice and privileges regardless of specialty/subspecialty.
- HEALTH SYSTEMS OR HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS are called upon to develop or expand palliative care practice opportunities for APNs across all settings.

- ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES who practice in palliative care are requested to document and disseminate the outcomes of their practice experience and roles, participate interdisciplinary research and its publication, and translate research findings into practice.
- ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES who practice as specialists in palliative care are encouraged to seek certification in their specialty through the National Board for Certification of Hospice and Palliative Nurses (NBCHPN[®]) and to mentor a new generation of palliative care APNS.

Definition of Terms:

Palliative care: Both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivery of care focused on the prevention and relief of suffering and the best possible quality of life for patients and their families. Key elements of palliative care are that it is patient and family centered, comprehensive, interdisciplinary care appropriate for patients of all ages who are experiencing debilitating chronic or life threatening illness, condition or injury from diagnosis through cure or death and into the family's bereavement period⁵

Advanced Practice Nurse: A nurse who has earned a graduate level degree in nursing and is prepared to exercise independent judgment, synthesize complex assessment data, initiate care plans and treatment regimens and to evaluate health care environments. The APN demonstrates advanced specialized clinical knowledge and skills.^{8,9}

References

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4. National Quality Forum. *National Quality Forum Endorses Framework for Evaluating Palliative and Hospice Care Quality*. Available at www.qualityforum.org/news/prPalliativeendorsed05-18-06.pdf. Accessed September 29, 2006.
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8. HPNA. *Competencies for Advanced Practice Hospice and Palliative Care Nurses*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing; 2002.
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