



## **HPNA Position Statement**

### **Value of the Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse in Palliative Care**

#### **Background**

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2, p.7; 3, p.6</sup> The licensed practical nurse (LPN), also called a licensed vocational nurse (LVN) plays an important and valuable role in the nursing care of all patients including those with life limiting illness.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, nursing has experienced periods of over supply and under supply. In periods of short supply efforts to create a nurse extender position to perform some of the work typically done by the registered nurse (RN) precipitated the development of the LPN/LVN role.<sup>5</sup> In 2005, there were approximately 710,000 LP/VNs in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The Hospice and Palliative LP/VN practices within the guidelines of individual State Boards of Nursing and provides evidenced-based physical, emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual care under the direction of a registered nurse.<sup>7</sup> The nursing care supports a collaborative process that promotes comfort to patients and families experiencing life-limiting illness. The LP/VN assists the RN by providing the necessary treatments, education, and documentation consistent with the plan of care. They are an important part of the interdisciplinary team and provide excellent information to the team who is ultimately responsible for the plan of care. The LP/VN participates in monitoring 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.<sup>4</sup>

## Position Statement

This is the position of the HPNA Board of Directors:

- Licensed practical nurses/licensed vocational nurses are an important member of the team and assist the professional nurse in providing nursing care that is critical to achieving the patients', families', and communities' goals of care in palliative care.
- Organizations need to clearly understand the differences and similarities between LP/VN and RN education and training, as well as the nursing functions that remain the responsibility of the RN.
- Persons developing policies, procedures and protocols ensure the role of the LP/VN in palliative care is consistent with; individual state nurse practice acts, 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:* The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and to support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of the disease or the need for other therapies. Palliative care is both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivering care. Palliative care expands traditional disease-model medical treatments to include the goals of enhancing quality of life for patient and family, optimizing function, helping with decision-making and providing opportunities for personal growth.<sup>8, p.3</sup>

*Evidence-based practice:* Practice that is based on research, clinical expertise, and patient preferences that guide decisions about the healthcare of individual patients. Evidence-based nursing practice stresses the use of research findings, quality improvement data (as appropriate), other operational, and evaluation data, the consensus of recognized experts, and affirmed experience to substantiate practice.<sup>9</sup>

*Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse:* A licensed practical nurse/vocational nurse is not a registered nurse. The term registered nurse is the practice of "professional nursing".<sup>1</sup> Becoming a LP/VN requires a 12-14 month post high school formal training program as well as supervised clinical instruction that focuses on the fundamental aspects of nursing care.<sup>1</sup> Once the training is complete, the graduate is required to pass a licensing examination for "practical nursing."<sup>6</sup>

## References

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This position statement reflects the bioethics standards or best available clinical evidence at the time of writing or revisions.

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