Advance Practice Nursing Roles

What this means to me

In my opinion, advanced practice nurses are now, more than ever before, essential to the delivery of quality, cost-effective care to a variety of populations in the United States. Advanced practice nurses currently function in four distinct role territories: (a) nurse practitioners, (b) clinical nurse specialists, (c) certified nurse midwives, and (d) certified registered nurse anesthetists. Nurse practitioners (NP) focus their practice on primary care and the promotion of health and wellness. Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) focuses more on the nursing management of illness in acute care; on consultation, education and research; and as clinical leaders within their field of expertise. Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM) provides care, comfort and education to childbearing families during the pregnancy and birthing experience. Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) provides anesthetic and analgesic care for a variety of patients during a relatively short but critical phase in their health care.

At their finest Nurse Practitioners act as primary care clinicians and also as collaborators, educators/instructors, role-models/mentors, care managers and care coordinators. They serve as sources of referral, as consultants, community partners/outreach specialists, program facilitators, advocates and counselors. They are (or ought to be) meticulous record-keepers and researchers; growing from novice to expert to fulfill the roles of leaders, managers, agents of change and ultimately social movers.

Do I as a (future) NPs always fulfill all these roles? Of course not, but as I grow into being a NP I should at least, and increasing so, be aware of the many different roles NPs assume in their professional and personal endeavors. In any one day or in any personal or professional interaction, nurse practitioners transition between, and skillfully combine, the different roles. Most prominently, during patient interaction, the NP may exhibit the roles of clinician, care manager and educator. Less obvious would be his/her actions as a role model, advocate and care coordinator. Behind his/her desk the NP becomes an accurate record keeper and a lifelong student. In interaction with other professionals, the NP acts as a skilled collaborator, a consultant in his/her field of expertise, a team member and a potential leader among peers. Within organizations the NP may function as a manager, a clinical advisor, mentor and facilitator.
and within his/her local community, an agent of change and social advocate. As an active member of a state and/or national nurses association the NP exhibits the role of involved professional and concerned citizen.

**Related Course Outcomes**

Reflecting on the different advance practice nursing roles and the course outcomes, I realized that each of the eight course outcomes (Washburn University School of Nursing, 2011a) can be related, at least to some extent, to the development of one or more role function.

The ability to: (1) “Integrate knowledge from previous courses to care for diverse adults in primary care settings” and, (2) “Apply critical thinking skills in the development of differential diagnoses related to select health problems encountered by adult populations” reflects the roles as developing clinician, adult learner and critical thinker who is able to integrate previously gained knowledge into current clinical practice. The outcome to, (3) “Exhibit advanced communication skills in interdisciplinary settings” reflects the expectation that students who complete this course will be able to effectively, appropriately and confidently engage in the roles of team member and collaborator while functioning as a part of the interdisciplinary (or multi-disciplinary) team; as a passionate advocate for patients’ rights and as a competent consultant in their field of expertise. The ability to (4) “Develop culturally appropriate, individualized patient education programs” represents the NP’s role as not only an advocate and champion of social and cultural acceptance but also the ability to act as an unbiased educator, instructor and mentor. Being able to, (5) “Design therapeutic interventions to maximize health and wellness in diverse adult populations” relates to the NP’s role as care manager, collaborator, consultant and source of referral. It also calls on the NP to be an avid researcher and a critical thinker. The outcome to, (6) “Evaluate diagnostic test results in collaboration with interdisciplinary teams” reminds me of the role expectation that NPs should critically evaluate a variety of findings (part of the role as a clinical expert) and act as collaborator within the interdisciplinary team. The ability to, (7) “Apply ethical and legal principles to care of adults in primary care settings” relates to the NP role as social advocate and competent, involved professional and member of a community. The expectation to, (8) “Utilize research
in providing culturally competent care” relates to the NP role as researcher and consumer of evidence-based practice while at the same time function with sensitivity towards clients and populations unique characteristics.

**Related Program Outcomes**

All of the desired program outcomes for nurse practitioners in this advance practice nursing program strongly reflect the different roles of the nurse practitioner. The relations between each program outcome (Washburn University School of Nursing, 2011b) and an advance practice role function can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1

*Relation between MSN program outcomes and advance practice nursing roles*

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<th>Program outcomes</th>
<th>Related advance practice role</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Provide organizational leadership demonstrating knowledge of health policy and health care systems</td>
<td>1. Leader, manager, engaged member of professional associations/societies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Integrate knowledge and theory into evidence-based practice and research.</td>
<td>2. Critical thinker/analyst, informed consumer of health information/nursing knowledge, researcher, peer reviewer</td>
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<td>3. Collaborate with interdisciplinary groups within the role and scope of advanced practice nursing.</td>
<td>3. Collaborator, consultant, team member, peer reviewer</td>
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<td>4. Demonstrate sound critical thinking and clinical decision-making.</td>
<td>4. Critical thinker, clinician</td>
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<td>5. Provide holistic care that is culturally proficient with diverse groups and communities.</td>
<td>5. Social advocate, educator, role-model, mentor</td>
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<td>6. Incorporate ethical and legal principles in health care policies.</td>
<td>6. Ethicist, social advocate, agent of change</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Integrate effective communication in advanced nursing roles.</td>
<td>7. Communicator extraordinaire</td>
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How this relates to my current practicum

My current practicum within a primary care setting provides the opportunity to start applying all the different roles of an advance practice nurse. As a novice, it is intimidating to think of fulfilling all the roles at once. While some role-functions are easier to assume, many of them need to be cultivated and nurtured. This does not happen in an instant but rather over a period of time through a process of self-reflection, self-evaluation and asking for feedback from fellow professionals. In some cases, role functions have to be adapted from that which was appropriate for a registered nurse to those which are expected of an advance practice nurse.

During my practicum experience I have the opportunity to observe a NP function within a variety of roles and how these roles are meshed with those of other providers (such as physicians, specialty providers and physician assistants) and other health care professionals (such as physical, occupational, speech, nutritional & respiratory therapists, lab technicians, radiologists, pharmacists). I am mentored as a participant of the health care team and encouraged to collaborate and consult with other health care providers. At this time, the main focus is definitely on the roles as clinician, patient educator, collaborator and life-long learner. Considering that everything cannot be learned at once, functioning as a member of the health care team affords valuable opportunities for constant collaboration and discussion of approaches and treatment options. This along with the regular observation of treatment procedures, participating in clinical decision making and being allowed to suggest a plan of care for patients, enables me to integrate knowledge into practice. Although I’ve had the opportunity to contribute some thoughts regarding some management issues, I do not yet feel very comfortable in management roles. I do however think that this is a role into which I will grow as I become more confident in my abilities as a clinician. Some roles in which I feel more confident at this time is that of patient educator, role-model and advocate for culturally sensitive care. Growing up outside the United States and living in several different countries have transformed my thoughts about encouraging clients to voice their cultural preferences and mentoring fellow professionals to receive culturally diverse clients with an open mind and an honest intent to curtail treatment to these cultural preferences.
The impact of advance practice roles on my future advanced practice

As future advance practice nurse I am now, more than ever before, aware of how much I still have to learn. I believe that learning is not just the momentary acquisition of knowledge or skills but only successfully occurs when knowledge and skills become honed and manifest itself in every aspect of practice. Looking at my future as advance practice nurse, I hope that I will always have a critical awareness of all the different role functions in a variety of circumstances. I’ve learned that different people are good at different things so as I prepare for my own advanced career, I try to find for each different advance practice role, a fellow professional whom I may consider the epitome of that specific role. From one NP, I may learn how to be an expert clinician who seamlessly integrates knowledge into practice and from the next, more about how to be an advocate for a certain population. From the passionate, energetic physician’s assistant, I may learn how to present a practice issue in such a way as to effect clinical practice changes for the improvement of patient care. From the eloquent collaborating physician I may learn that being an expert does not mean that I know all the answers and that the best patient care actually flows from a team which works together for the benefit of their patients.

References
