

Registered nurses

**Recognising the responsibilities
and contribution of registered
nurses within social care**

Preface

This statement provides a description of the role, knowledge and skills employed by registered nurses who work in the adult social care sector in England. It represents the common characteristics across different service settings and reflects the passion of those who work in this field.

The statement has been developed by Skills for Care in consultation with registered nurses and the people they support, plus other professionals who work in and with the adult social care sector.

Its' purpose is to raise the profile and reputation of nursing in the adult social care sector, by promoting understanding about the contribution that these registered nurses can make to national health and social care agendas.



An overview of the adult social care sector

The adult social care sector in England is responsible for the provision of personal care, protection and social support to adults (18+) who may be at risk or have care and/or support needs.

The key legislation is the Care Act 2014, and responsibility for providing social care support lies with local authorities. They commission services according to the requirements of their communities, define the local eligibility criteria and implement means testing to determine levels of funding.

An estimated 18,500¹ separate organisations - employing a total of 1.49 million people – are involved in providing or organising adult social care across England. These organisations include private, voluntary and independent providers of different sizes and they incorporate all types of service provision - day, domiciliary, respite, out-reach, long and short-term care. They encompass different service user groups such as people with learning disabilities, those living with enduring physical or mental health needs, and conditions associated with old age, plus individuals who experience social exclusion through such things as addiction, or homelessness.

The Care Quality Commission is the regulatory body for the social care sector.

A distinct nursing role



The adult social care sector workforce includes employment of 41,000¹ Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registered nurses bound by the Code of Professional Standards of Practice².

The distinct expertise of this group of registered nurses is in enabling individuals with care and support needs, many of whom have multiple co-morbidities and complex health issues, to live positively in their own homes.

They embody the capabilities and cultures of both health and social care professions and employ their nursing knowledge and skills within a social model of care. Their focus is not only on an individual's health condition and resulting impairment but also on the impact this has on their participation in social and community life.

The diversity of the adult social care sector means that role specifications may vary depending on the setting in which the registered nurse is employed. Job descriptions may also include a level of operational and business management. In some cases the registered nurse might also be the registered manager.



If I need a nurse I can count on them, it is peace of mind for me living here that you can rely on the nurses. I think they are all marvellous.

Resident at Sun Court Nursing Home

¹ Overview of the size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, as at 2019

² The Code : Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates (NMC, 2018)

A relationship-based approach to supporting well-being

Registered nurses work as part of broader care teams that are concerned with creating quality whole-life experiences for individuals who may not be able to provide these for themselves.

They are experienced in relationship-based practice and see it as central to their role to spend time with the people in their care (and their families) in order to gain understanding of their personal stories, needs, wants and ways of communicating.

Because many of the people they support may have specific sensory, cognitive or behavioural needs, registered nurses tailor their approaches in response to individual requirements. They work flexibly and are very likely to use ordinary life activities such as making a meal, or helping someone to participate in a social occasion as ways of building and maintaining trusting human relationships.

Person-centred nursing practice



Through these relationships registered nurses are able to develop an in-depth understanding of a person's physical, social, emotional states, and recognise the normal patterns of their complex health and well-being needs.

In this way they are able to promote the health of the people they support and maintain them when they are well. When they are unwell registered nurses use their enhanced assessment skills and knowledge, to consider best practice and choice of intervention, act immediately on subtle changes in a person's condition, and off-set an acute health crisis. This unique continuity of care is key to enhancing and maintaining a persons' quality of life, yet is often unseen by the wider system.

Registered nurses in the social care sector aim to maintain the people they support in their home environment as far as this is possible. Where an individual is on an end of life trajectory they provide compassionate, comfortable and reassuring palliative care for them, their families and friends.

Crucially this relationship-based, person-centred nursing care, leads to a high degree of trust and means that registered nurses are in prime position to act as advocates and enable the people they support to have a voice, exercise choice and exert control with regard to the health care they receive.



Having a qualified nurse has made all the difference to my care. She is able to identify and instigate treatment much more quickly and prevent me from getting worse. I feel more secure knowing she is looking after me. She has a good relationship with my GP and will talk to them about my care needs.

Resident at The Crown Rest Home

Leading and enabling others



While all registered nurses are required to provide leadership and act as a role model, in the social care sector this is likely to represent a significant element of many job descriptions.

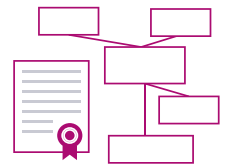
This is particularly the case in settings where there may only be one or two registered nurses (per shift or in the organisation as a whole). In such situations they may be employed in senior positions, with responsibility for leading a mixed team of assistant practitioners and/or care staff who provide much of the direct care.

Their role is to be the accountable health professional and take overall responsibility for:

- assessment, evaluation and review of individual health needs
- complex, evidence-based clinical decision making
- planning and co-ordinating care plans
- liaising with external stakeholders
- creating a culture that supports compassion in care
- appropriate delegation and supervision of assistant practitioners and care staff.

In addition, as senior members of staff, registered nurses may also share responsibility for the operational management of the service in which they are employed. Depending on their position they may be the responsible person on a shift. In these circumstances, they have to deal with whatever occurs be it a breakdown of the lift, the cook going off sick or an unannounced CQC (Care Quality Commission) inspection visit.

Operating within a complex regulatory and organisational landscape



The social care context requires registered nurses to operate with a high level of autonomy in relation to a complex range of legal and regulatory frameworks associated with safeguarding, ensuring well-being and protecting human rights.

They regularly grapple with legal and ethical dilemmas concerning such things as an individual's capacity to consent, the involvement of family members and positive-risk taking in relation to health and well-being interventions. All of these scenarios can involve very sensitive, high profile areas of decision making requiring sound legal understanding and record-keeping to ensure compliance with the relevant local and national protocols.

In England, while health care is free at the point of need social care is means tested. The implications of this for people with both health and social care needs can be far-reaching and registered nurses may be directly connected to multi-agency decision-making about eligibility and service provision.

This professional engagement with the business side of the service is unique to the social care sector, and provides the opportunity for registered nurses to influence the way their organisations evolve.

At the frontline of health and social care boundaries



The in-depth knowledge that registered nurses possess about the needs of the people they support means that they are well placed to lead care planning across social and health care systems.

They are outward-looking and possess intelligence about local health care services and social support organisations. They provide advice, signpost or refer the people they support, plus their families on occasion, to whatever help and assistance may be needed.

Registered nurses in adult social care are “systems” leaders. They are confident in working across organisational boundaries and they use enhanced interpersonal skills - negotiation, mediation and advocacy - to navigate the layers of complexity that are often involved in accessing services. They do this by building relationships and working collaboratively with the many different members of multi-professional teams for example GPs and hospital clinicians, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, social workers and housing providers.

Given the high levels of need for health care services experienced by many of the people they support, registered nurses in social care settings make a significant contribution to health and social care agendas such as:

- hospital admission avoidance
- early discharge
- managing long term and enduring conditions
- prevention
- re-ablement
- health and wellbeing.

In summary – a multi-faceted role

Registered nurses in adult social care enjoy high levels of professional autonomy and responsibility. This supports confident and innovative practice together with strong clinical decision-making.

The multi-faceted nature of their role means they also develop a wide range of transferable expertise with the need to be flexible, resourceful and creative in finding solutions to short, medium and longer term care and business needs.



I have the privilege of being in a key position to bridge the gap between health and social care and see the benefits to vulnerable people when this works harmoniously.

Working in the health sector is something that comes as part and parcel of being a nurse of course, but... being able to carry out a health care role in the social care sector opens the nursing world to a whole new way of thinking.

Charlotte Hilburn: Nurse trainer for Independence Matters



I love working in social care because it is challenging and interesting. No two days are the same and it is extremely rewarding.

It is a privilege to work at The Crown Rest Home and care for the residents who have complex care needs. I am able to look after residents when they are physically well helping them to maintain their health and I nurse them when they are unwell, giving very specific person-centred care.

I would encourage others to work in the sector because you have a varied career looking after multiple pathology and are very much part of the community multidisciplinary team.

Patricia Ralph: Clinical Manager at The Crown Rest Home



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