Abstract Paper

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Title: International Certification for Home Health Nurses: Can It Become A Reality?

Abstract

In the United States, nurses who are certified in a specialty area of nursing practice have demonstrated and proven their ability to achieve better outcomes for the patients they serve. Specialty nursing practice is characterized by a specialized set of knowledge and skills above and beyond the basic level of nursing education and licensure. For example, licensure as a registered nurse does not assure the nurse has the knowledge and skills to care for patients needing specialized care, such as patients with complex chronic wounds or patients needing complex infusion therapy. In fact, when nurses switch from one specialty area to another, they frequently find themselves feeling like novice nurses again, barely competent in the new area of practice. Only with time and effort do they acquire the new nursing knowledge and skills necessary for the new specialty area, and only gradually progress through the levels of competence, until becoming experts in the new specialty area.

How does a nurse know and demonstrate to others – patients and their families, other nurses and the interprofessional team, their employers and policy makers – that they are indeed experts in a particular area of nursing practice? In the United States, they do this by becoming certified in their specialized area of practice. Professional nursing organizations (e.g., the Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing Society, the Infusion Nursing Society) and national nursing associations (e.g., American Nurses Credentialing Center) sponsor certification processes, by which nurses demonstrate through an examination or through a portfolio process that they have become expert in a specialty area of nursing practice.

Home health nursing is a specialty area of practice. Outlined in the Home Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (ANA, 2014), the knowledge, skills and competencies that home health nursing requires are quite specialized. Research indicates that it takes additional education and considerable experience to master those skills (Neal, 2007). Yet currently, in the United States, for a number of
complex reasons, home health nurses have no way to demonstrate their competence in home health nursing.

This presentation aims to outline the purpose and the possible avenues available for an international home health certification process. Then the presenters will ask questions of participants to stimulate a discussion about certification in home health nursing. Is this issue as critical to the nurses in other countries as it is to American nurses? What are American and international nurses able to teach one another about demonstrating competence? Since competence is demonstrated by mastering competencies, how congruent are the Home Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (ANA, 2014) measurement criteria with home health nursing in countries outside the United States? Could they be used as the basis of an internationally-appropriate home health certification curriculum? Would international nurses be interested in and support efforts to develop criteria for an internationally-appropriate home health nursing certification program? If so, what are the next steps we need to take to turn certification in home health nursing into a reality?