

# COMPETENCY STANDARDS FOR SPECIALIST PALLIATIVE CARE NURSING PRACTICE

## Introduction to Using this Framework:

This framework provides a set of competency standards for specialist palliative care nursing practice. A number of key concepts underpin the framework.

**Specialist nursing practice** refers to nursing practice that builds on a base of generalist preparation, focusing upon a specific area of nursing, directed toward a defined population and reflective of depth of knowledge and relevant skills.<sup>1</sup>

**Specialist palliative care** refers to those services provided by medical, nursing or allied health professionals comprising consultative or ongoing care for individuals with life-limiting illnesses, and support for their caregivers and family. These health care professionals are recognised as specialist by an accrediting body, or primarily work in palliative care if an accrediting body is unavailable.<sup>2</sup>

**Specialist palliative care teams** are multidisciplinary and relate to both general and hospital practice, being available to provide advice and support that bridges the divide between home and hospital and to hospice care. Education, research and support of other health care professionals are key roles for specialist palliative care.<sup>3</sup>

This framework is intended for those specialist palliative care nurses who practice in specialist palliative care services described in Palliative Care Australia's *Capability and Resource Matrix*.<sup>2</sup>

The framework is comprised of five **Domains** of specialist palliative care nursing practice:

- **Therapeutic Relationships**
- **Complex Supportive Care**
- **Collaborative Practice**
- **Leadership**
- **Improving Practice**

Whilst each of these domains is described separately for clarity, in practice they are interrelated.

Each domain comprises the following elements: a **Description** is given of its key focus and features. A number of **Competency Standards** that describe the level of achievement required for each of these areas of professional practice. A total of twelve competency standards are described across the domains. For each competency standard, a number of **Cues** are listed, providing concrete, measurable indicators of specialist palliative care nursing practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Nursing Council. (1998). *Scope of Nursing Practice: Decision Making Framework*. Brisbane: QNC.

<sup>2</sup> Palliative Care Australia. (2005). *Standards for Providing Quality Palliative Care for All Australians*. Canberra: PCA.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, D., & Seymour, J. (1999). *Reflections on Palliative Care*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

## Citation:

The authors welcome the application of this framework to specialist palliative care nursing practice and other related fields. The recommended citation is:

Canning, D., Yates, P. & Rosenberg, J.P. (2005) *Competency Standards for Specialist Palliative Care Nursing Practice*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

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*A joint project between the **Centre for Palliative Care Research and Education** and **Queensland University of Technology**, funded through the **Queensland Nursing Council**.*

# DOMAIN: THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS

## Description:

The focus of this domain is achieving optimal palliative care outcomes for individuals with life limiting disease with complex needs, and their caregivers and family, through building a climate of trust, a sense of solidarity and empowerment that goes beyond the performance of caring tasks. This relationship, which is facilitated within mutually agreed boundaries and may need to be skilfully facilitated in a short period of time within a range of contexts, is the critical foundation for specialist palliative nursing practice.

## Competency Standard 1:

*Sensitively establishes, maintains and adapts effective therapeutic partnerships with individuals with life-limiting illnesses, their caregivers and family according to individual needs, circumstances and preferences.*

### Cues:

- 1.1 Actively promotes individuals, their caregivers and family as partners in the assessment, planning, delivery and evaluation of complex, holistic care, in line with their wishes.
- 1.2 Systematically identifies and advocates on an ongoing basis for the individual's goals, priorities and choices regarding palliative care, within mutually agreed boundaries.

## Competency Standard 2:

*Demonstrates respect for uniqueness and individual autonomy, when responding to the individual's experiences and response to dying and bereavement.*

### Cues:

- 2.1 Sensitively applies advanced knowledge of the individual's, their caregiver's and family's social, spiritual, cultural and personal contexts and experiences when responding to complex and multidimensional care needs.
- 2.2 Demonstrates highly skilled, individualised and timely communication between individuals, their caregivers, family members, and members of the health team regarding the individual's needs, wishes and care.

## Competency Standard 3:

*Negotiates mutually agreed goals of care within a therapeutic environment, and facilitates person-centred decision making to promote optimal outcomes for individuals with life limiting disease, their caregivers and family.*

### Cues:

- 3.1 Supports and builds the personal resources and strengths of individuals with a life limiting disease and their caregivers and family to facilitate person-centred decision making, achievement of identified goals and meeting of care needs.
- 3.2 Uses effective strategies to establish a therapeutic environment that promotes a person-centred approach to meeting the needs of individuals with life limiting disease, their caregivers and family.

## Competency Standard 4:

*Recognises the effects of the intimate and intense nature of caring for individuals with a life limiting disease, their caregivers and family has on the self and other members of the team, and responds effectively.*

### **Cues:**

- 4.1 Utilises effective self-care strategies to minimise potential stressors related to the ongoing care of individuals with life limiting disease, their caregivers and family.
- 4.2 Engages in strategies that support members of the health team involved in meeting the diverse needs of individuals with life limiting disease, their caregivers and family.

# DOMAIN: COMPLEX SUPPORTIVE CARE

## Description:

The focus of this domain is achieving optimal palliative care outcomes through identifying, providing and evaluating advanced palliative care interventions for people with life-limiting illness, their caregivers and family, which are based on an ongoing, comprehensive and holistic assessment of the person's health and support needs, personal resources, and personal goals and wishes. Complex supportive care interventions are provided directly by the specialist palliative care nurse, and indirectly through collaboration with other nurses and members of the health team.

## Competency Standard 5:

*Demonstrates advanced palliative care knowledge and skills in meeting the multiple, complex care needs of individuals with life-limiting illnesses, their caregivers and family, across the continuum of care including bereavement, and in the context of an interdisciplinary approach to care.*

### Cues:

- 5.1 Integrates advanced palliative care knowledge and skills to identify the complex and multiple palliative care needs of individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 5.2 Integrates advanced palliative care knowledge and skills when implementing palliative care interventions with individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 5.3 Continuously evaluates and reassesses the effectiveness of palliative care interventions in a timely manner and modifies care plans where necessary to achieve optimal outcomes for individuals, their caregivers and family.<sup>4</sup>
- 5.4 Consults and collaborates with other members of the health team and support services to enhance the provision of a holistic and multidimensional approach to meeting the complex, holistic needs of individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 5.5 Applies comprehensive knowledge of health and support services and community resources in developing and implementing care plans for individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 5.6 Uses effective evidence-based strategies in developing the knowledge and self-care abilities of individuals, their caregivers and family in palliative care.

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<sup>4</sup> Modified from Gardner, G., Carryer, J., Dunn, S. & Gardner, A. (2004) *Nurse Practitioner Standards Project - A Report to the Australian Nursing Council*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

# DOMAIN: COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

## Description:

The focus of this domain is achieving optimal palliative care outcomes through effective consultation and collaboration with other nurses, members of the multidisciplinary team and community representatives regarding the needs of the individual with life limiting disease, their caregivers and family. This collaborative approach promotes the exchange of palliative care knowledge and resource information.

## Competency Standard 6:

***Demonstrates advanced skills in collaborating with individuals, their caregivers and family, other nurses and members of the health care team to promote optimal palliative care outcomes.***

### Cues:

- 6.1 Demonstrates advanced understanding of the roles, and utilises the strengths, of the interdisciplinary team to facilitate optimal palliative care outcomes for individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 6.2 Acts as an expert resource person for individuals, their caregivers and family, members of the health care team and other community or professional groups, to facilitate optimal palliative care outcomes for individuals, their caregivers and family with complex care needs.
- 6.3 Facilitates the exchange of comprehensive information about the individual's palliative care needs, personal goals and plan of care between the individual with life limiting illness, their caregivers and family, and members of the health care team.
- 6.4 Collaborates with other health care professionals in a manner which is sensitive to the workplace culture and which respects each individual's contribution to palliative care.

## Competency Standard 7:

***Builds the capacity of nurses, other health team members and the wider community to understand and respond to complex palliative care health and support needs for individuals, their caregivers, and family.***

### Cues:

- 7.1 Actively supports other care providers in complex problem solving regarding the palliative care of individuals, their caregivers and family.
- 7.2 Actively supports other care providers in responding to complex palliative care ethical dilemmas.
- 7.3 Engages with representatives of the wider community to promote effective community responses to supporting people with life-limiting illnesses, their caregivers and family.

# DOMAIN: LEADERSHIP

## Description:

The focus of this domain is the development of nurses' contribution to the advancement of quality palliative care services. In this context, leadership is not necessarily synonymous with the managerial responsibilities assigned to specialist palliative care nurses in senior positions in organisations. Rather, leadership in this context reflects a focus on the strategic development of palliative care, through innovation and mentorship, and through contribution to palliative care policy, standards development and evaluation, and professional activities in palliative care.

## Competency Standard 8:

*Actively participates in professional activities that promote the continuing development of quality palliative care*

### Cues:

- 8.1 Provides a positive role model and mentorship for palliative care practitioners, other health professionals and the wider community regarding the development and continuous improvement of quality palliative care services.
- 8.2 Actively contributes to the activities of professional groups relevant to palliative care.
- 8.3 Disseminates palliative care knowledge through a variety of both written and oral forms.

## Competency Standard 9:

*Actively participates in policy and service development activities that contribute to the delivery of quality palliative care.*

### Cues:

- 9.1 Develops, implements and evaluates innovations which contribute to the continuous improvement and advancement of palliative care.
- 9.2 Actively contributes to service planning and development activities, including the development and evaluation of palliative care policy.

## Competency Standard 10:

*Applies an advanced understanding of contemporary legal, ethical and professional standards relevant to the provision of quality palliative care services in the delivery and development of palliative care services.*

### Cues:

- 10.1 Advocates for improvements to palliative care where relevant at the individual, team, service, and system levels.
- 10.2 Engages in activities which contribute to the professional development of others, and the advancement of nursing's contribution to quality palliative care.

# DOMAIN: IMPROVING PRACTICE

## Description:

The focus of this domain is the continuous improvement of palliative care practice through critical inquiry, application of best available evidence, and engagement in processes which promote critical reflection on the effectiveness of palliative care and ongoing professional development.

## Competency Standard 11:

*Creates and sustains processes which support a positive culture of continuous critical inquiry in the provision of palliative care.*

### Cues:

- 11.1 Supports research in palliative care by identifying gaps in practice and determining research priorities.
- 11.2 Facilitates the conduct of high quality and ethical research in palliative care.
- 11.3 Uses relevant sources to seek additional knowledge when presented with complex or challenging situations.
- 11.4 Engages in activities which contribute to the professional development of self, and the advancement of the nursing profession's contribution to quality palliative care.

## Competency Standard 12:

*Demonstrates an ongoing, high level commitment to critical reflection and continuous professional development as a specialist palliative care nurse.*

### Cues:

- 12.1 Critically appraises, integrates and promotes the dissemination of available evidence from a variety of sources to direct and guide the provision of evidenced based specialist palliative care practice.
- 12.2 Critically appraises, validates and integrates knowledge from a variety of sources to further develop and improve palliative care nursing practice in self and others.
- 12.3 Uses critical reflection to evaluate and further develop and improve palliative care nursing practice in self and others.
- 12.4 Participates in professional supervision or other peer review processes for monitoring the effectiveness of palliative care practice.