

ICN Regulation Series



ICN Framework of Competencies for the Nurse Specialist

International Council of Nurses

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Educated as a nurse and midwife, Fadwa Affara practised in both fields in the UK and abroad. After obtaining an MSc in Nursing with a specialty in education she spent the next 12 years in nursing education, initially in Scotland and then in Bahrain where she oversaw the reform of nursing education. She joined the International Council of Nurses in 1987, initially as director of an international nursing regulation project, and then as one of ICN's consultants for nursing and health policy. Her ICN responsibilities included women's health, child health, education, regulation, and the International Classification for Nursing Practice and the International Nurse Practitioner/Advance Practice Nursing Network.

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INTRODUCTION

The term specialist was first applied in nursing in the early years of the 20th century as more postgraduate courses in specific areas of practice became available.¹ Today, a myriad number of nursing specialties and subspecialties could be identified around the globe. The experience of the International Council of Nurses is while the growth of specialties has remained unabated over the past two decades, it is difficult to ascribe any uniformity in the evolution of nursing specialties with respect to titling, scope of practice, education and practice standards, and paths of entry^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8} to this category of nursing personnel defined by Castledine as a person "... who has narrowed their focus of knowledge and skill into the specific medical and nursing needs of a particular group of patients."⁹ ICN first took an in-depth interest in the way nurse specialties were developing in 1987 when its Professional Services Committee produced a discussion, *Specialization in Nursing*.¹⁰ In noting the growing confusion in the field, ICN observed that specialty practice "...implies a level of knowledge and skill in a particular aspect of nursing which is greater than that acquired during the course of basic nursing education."¹¹ ICN suggested that specialty preparation take place around the major fields of nursing -- medical/surgical, maternal/child health, mental health/psychiatric, paediatric, geriatric, and public health/community nursing. ICN's 1986 Report on the Regulation of Nursing: A Report on the Present, A Position for the Future defined a nurse specialist as a nurse with "...advanced education and expertise in a branch of nursing, built upon the nurse base of competence and authority for generalist practice in all settings and branches of nursing."¹² Other standards proposed in the report include:

1. Education for nursing specialty practice is a formally recognised programme of study built upon education required for qualification as a registered/licensed nurse and providing the content and experience to ensure competency in specialty practice.
2. Preparation and authorisation are in accordance with scope of practice and with the education and regulatory policies and practices for post-basic specialists in other professions.¹³

In 1992, using the experience gained from ICN's International Regulation Project, the subject of nurse specialisation was revisited. On this occasion ICN suggested criteria for designating specialties (refer to Appendix 1) and a number of standards to be applied to specialist education, practice and regulation.¹⁴ The criteria for recognising specialties have been adopted by the European Network of Nurses Organizations and the European Federation of Nurses Associations (previously the Standing Committee of Nurses of the EU) in *Recommendations for a European Framework for Specialist Nursing Education*.¹⁵ To bring more order and consistency to the way specialist practice was developing in Australia, a National Nursing and Education Taskforce in Australia proposed in 2006 a national specialist framework which included criteria for recognising specialties that are consistent with those proposed by ICN.¹⁶

Definitions

Competence: Refers to the effective application of a combination of knowledge, skill and judgement demonstrated by an individual in daily practice or job performance. In nursing definitions, there is wide ranging agreement that, in the performance of nursing roles to the standards required in employment, competence reflects the following:

- Knowledge, understanding and judgement;
- A range of skills cognitive, technical or psychomotor and interpersonal; and
- A range of personal attributes and attitudes.¹⁷

Generalist Nurse: The scope of preparation and practice enables the generalist nurse to have the capacity and authority to practise competently primary, secondary and tertiary health care* in all settings and branches of nursing. In some countries, the nurse, on entry to practice after successful completion of her/his country's initial nursing education, is called a Registered Nurse (RN); in others, a Licensed Nurse, professional or qualified nurse. In this document, these terms are taken as synonymous.¹⁸

Registered Nurse: A registered nurse is one who (a) has successfully completed a programme of education approved by the nursing board/council, (b) has passed the examination established by the nursing board/council (if appropriate), and (c) continues to meet the standards of the nursing board.¹⁹

The terms *licensed, professional or qualified nurse* are used in a similar sense. For the purpose of this document registered nurse is used to denote this category of nursing personnel.

Nurse Specialist: The nurse specialist is a nurse prepared beyond the level of a generalist nurse and authorised to practice as a specialist with advanced expertise in a branch of the nursing field. Specialist practice includes clinical, teaching, administration, research and consultant roles.²⁰

Nursing: Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, education, and participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, are also key nursing roles.²¹

Scope of Practice: The range of roles, functions, responsibilities and activities, which a registered/licensed professional is educated for, competent in, and is authorised to perform. It defines the accountability and limits of practice.²²

* While **tertiary** refers to specialised care delivered by specialists working in a centre that has personnel and facilities for special investigations, treatment and support services, in this definition it is used to denote care for chronic, long-term illness.

Scope of the Document

ICN firmly places the nurse specialist education and practice on the foundation of education and competencies of the generalist nurse practice. The domains of the revised **ICN Framework and Competencies for the Generalist Nurse** are used to guide the process of identifying core nurse specialist competencies (Figure 1).

The competencies identified will be those for registered nurses working in specialist clinical roles. They will not necessarily include the core competencies required by registered nurses in specialty practice areas such as education, administration, research, quality improvement, professional development, or informatics.²³

Assumptions

1. The pre-requisite for entry into specialty practice requires educational qualification and registration/licensure as a generalist (professional) nurse.
2. The specialty defines itself as nursing and subscribes to the overall purpose, functions, and ethical standards of nursing.
3. Specialty practice is sufficiently complex and advanced so that it is beyond the scope of general nursing practice. It includes advanced nursing and/or clinical skills, advisory, research, teaching and administrative activities in the field of the specialty.
4. Specialty expertise is obtained through a professionally approved education programme that leads to a recognised qualification.

ICN Framework of Competencies

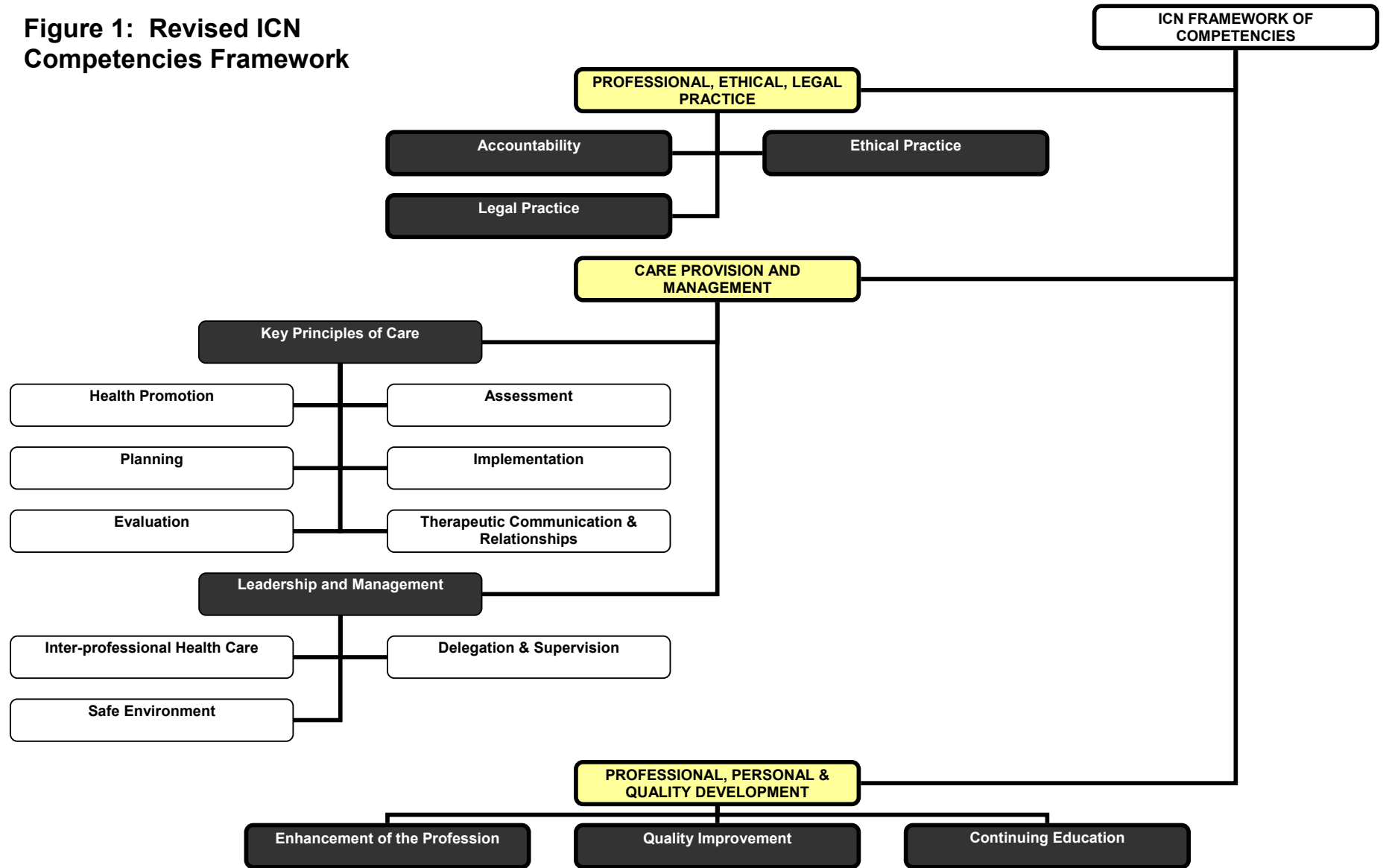
The ICN Framework of Competencies was developed to identify competencies expected of a generalist at the point of entry into professional practice (registered nurse) in 2003²⁴ and ICN successfully applied it to identify core competencies for the emerging specialty of the family nurse.²⁵ Similar work was carried out in relation to the advanced practice role.* It has been used in various ways internationally. For example, the regulatory bodies of the concerned countries used it to identify common competencies for registered nurses in South East Asia and the Western Pacific.²⁶ Another application was as a guide to the development of a competency inventory for registered nurses in the People's Republic of China.²⁷ In the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre in Saudi Arabia, the ICN framework forms the basis for a clinical practice assessment portfolio for new graduates undertaking a period of internship.²⁸ Recently, the framework has been updated to keep pace with the evolving practice of the registered nurse and is an integral part of ICN's work on the Nursing Care Continuum and Competencies (2008).

The framework (Figure 1) groups competencies under three headings:

1. Professional, ethical and legal practice
2. Care provision and management
3. Professional, personal and quality development

* Defined by ICN in 2002 as ... a registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context and/or country in which s/he is credentialed to practice. A master's degree is recommended for entry level.

Figure 1: Revised ICN Competencies Framework



ICN FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCIES FOR THE NURSE SPECIALIST

The competencies and knowledge identified in the framework for the nurse specialist have been derived from an analysis of definitions, functions, competencies, job descriptions, educational and training programmes, or national competencies required for certification as a nurse specialist. As the ICN position is that the authority to practise as a registered nurse is an essential requirement for specialty practice, the ICN competencies for the generalist nurse form the foundation for specialist practice. In some cases, competencies will be common to both categories particular in areas dealing with ethical practice, accountability, health promotion, organisation of care, delegation and supervision and continuing education.

Different specialty groups have tackled the task of developing competency frameworks.^{29,30,31 32,33,34,35} A good example of the range of domains identified for specialty practice is illustrated by a project which set out to identify specialist breast nurse competency standards and associated educational requirements.³⁶ Domains identified were:

Coordination of care Case management Continuity of care	Providing emotional/ psychological support Therapeutic communication	Specialist knowledge Leadership
Organisation/management of care Teamwork	Enabling education Information giving	Research/evidence-based practice Critical thinking & analysis Problem identification and solving

Comparison of the ICN framework with selected specialist frameworks (Specialist Breast Nurse, Multiple Sclerosis Nurse Specialist, Parkinson’s Disease Nurse Specialist, Cancer Nurse Specialist and Older Adult Nurse Specialist) suggests much similarity in the competency domains, although terminology and levels of granularity may differ. (Refer to Appendix 2 for the comparison of the ICN framework with other specialty practice frameworks).

The following points should be noted about the framework:

1. The framework follows the domains identified in Figure 1.
2. Nurse specialist competencies, knowledge and skills build on those identified in the ICN framework for registered nurses.
3. The content suggested under the skills/knowledge column is *not exclusive* to the section in which it is placed. Content should be viewed as an integrated whole required to support the acquisition of competencies for effective role performance.

ICN Framework of Competencies for the Nurse Specialist

Accountability

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Accepts accountability for own professional judgement, actions, outcomes of care and continued competence in accordance with scope of practice, increased responsibility, legislative acts and regulations.	Accepts accountability for increased responsibility, for own professional judgement, actions, outcomes of care and continued competence in accordance with scope of practice, legislative acts and regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specialist scope of practice ▪ Codes of practice of other professionals involved in multidisciplinary team work ▪ Concepts of shared competencies, responsibility and accountability ▪ Professional supervision of practice – legal and institutional policies and protocols
Recognises the limits of scope of practice and own competence.	Recognises the limits of scope of practice and own competence.	
Seeks guidance from appropriate others when encountering situations beyond own knowledge, competence or scope of practice.	Consults with or refers to appropriate others when encountering situations beyond own knowledge, competence or scope of practice.	
Recognises and respects the different levels of accountability for the range of available personnel.	Recognises and respects different levels of accountability for the range of available personnel.	
Participates in activities related to improving access to the range of services required for effective health services.	Participates in activities related to improving access to the range of services required for effective specialist services.	

Ethical Practice

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Practises in a manner that conforms to the <i>ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses</i> , the professional code in force in the jurisdiction and employer's code of conduct.	Practises in a manner that conforms to the <i>ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses</i> , the professional code in force in the jurisdiction and employer's code of conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contemporary ethical issues specific to specialty practice area in daily practice and in exceptional situations ▪ Approaches to ethical decision-making – analysing and proposing solutions ▪ Advocacy strategies for the client/patient, for specialist service, supportive policies and resources at strategic levels (e.g. gaps in service, resource issues, education of health professionals, legal barriers) ▪ Human and health rights instruments available in context of care and their applications in specialty practice area ▪ Confidentiality and privacy specific to specialty practice area ▪ Concepts of society, custom, beliefs and values specific to specialty practice area and impact on health care ▪ Knowledge of practices and beliefs in ethnic/religious groups specific to specialty practice area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication - Food - Personal hygiene - Physical contact - Family - Religious requirements - Health practices ▪ Adapting practice to meet ethnic/religious beliefs and practices ▪ Strategies for dealing with harmful traditional practices ▪ Safety (of practice and environmental) concerns specific to specialty practice area
Engages in effective ethical decision-making with respect to own professional responsibilities or where ethical issues affect the broader health care team.	Engages in effective ethical decision-making with respect to own professional practice areas or where ethical issues affect the broader health care team.	
Acts in an advocacy role to protect human rights and questions violations of client in accordance with jurisdictional and the <i>ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses</i> .	Acts in an advocacy role to protect human rights and questions violations of client in accordance with jurisdictional and the <i>ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses</i> .	
Maintains confidentiality and security of written, verbal and electronic information acquired in a professional capacity.	Maintains confidentiality and security of written, verbal and electronic information acquired in a professional capacity.	
Respects the client's right to privacy and dignity.	Respects the client's right to privacy and dignity.	
Respects the client's right to information, choice and self-determination in nursing and health care.	Respects the client's right to information, choice and self-determination in nursing and health care.	
Challenges behaviour and health care practice that could compromise client safety, privacy or dignity.	Challenges behaviour and health care practice that could compromise client safety, privacy or dignity.	
	Demonstrates professional integrity, probity and ethical conduct in response to industry marketing strategies when prescribing drugs and other products.	

Legal Practice

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Practises in accordance with professional, relevant civil legislation and regulations.	Practises in accordance with professional, relevant civil legislation and regulations including those specific to specialty practice area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Laws relevant to practice in specialty practice area including special rights and service access issues ▪ Professional regulation of specialty practice area including obtaining and maintaining registration/licence ▪ Codes/rules/regulations specifically pertaining to specialty practice area
Practises in accordance with jurisdictional and local policies and procedural guidelines.	Practises in accordance with jurisdictional and local policies and procedural guidelines.	
Recognises and acts upon breaches of law relating to the professional role and/or professional code of conduct/code of practice.	Recognises and acts upon breaches of law relating to the professional role and/or professional code of conduct/code of practice.	

Principles of Care Provision

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Uses knowledge from nursing, health and other disciplines combined with best available evidence to explain nursing decisions and interventions.	Uses knowledge from nursing, health and other disciplines combined with best available evidence to explain nursing decisions and interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of national and local resources (e.g. information, support groups, services) available relevant to specialty practice area ▪ Theoretical underpinning of nursing practice in clinical specialty ▪ Case management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Components of case management – Case management models – Role in case management ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Case management – Principles of disaster planning – Special requirements for patients in specialty practice area in disaster situations – Strategies to ensure disaster measures meet and continue to be relevant to specialty needs
Applies contemporary knowledge from different sources and the best available evidence to base professional decision-making and practice.	Applies contemporary knowledge from different sources and specialty practice area and the best available evidence to base professional decision-making and practice.	
Applies critical thinking skills and a systems approach to problem solving and nursing decision-making across a range of professional and care delivery contexts.	Applies critical thinking skills and a systems approach to problem solving and nursing decision-making and specialty care delivery contexts.	
Delivers care consistent with professional and organisational standards, policies, protocols and procedures.	Delivers care consistent with professional and organisational standards, policies, protocols and procedures applicable to specialist nursing practice.	
Recognises culturally sensitive needs and adapts practice accordingly.	Recognises culturally sensitive needs and adapts practice accordingly.	
Incorporates traditional healing practices valued by clients and with proven beneficial or harmless effects into care activities.	Incorporates traditional healing practices valued by clients and with proven beneficial or harmless effects into care activities.	
Applies advocacy skills to assist clients unable to represent or speak for themselves.	Applies advocacy skills to assist clients unable to represent or speak for themselves regarding specialty care requirements.	

Principles of Care Provision (contd)

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Acts as an information and education resource for clients seeking to improve life styles, adopt illness/injury prevention activities and cope with changes in health, disability and death.	Acts as an information and education resource in the specialty practice area for clients seeking healthier life styles, adopt illness/injury prevention activities and cope with changes in health, disability and death.	
Provides guidance/instruction in the development and/or maintenance of independent living skills.	Provides guidance/instruction in the development and/or maintenance of independent living skills.	
Recognises opportunities and provides guidance/education to individuals, families and communities to encourage adoption of illness prevention activities and maintenance of healthy lifestyles.	Recognises opportunities and provides guidance/education to individuals, families and communities to encourage adoption of illness prevention activities and maintenance of healthy lifestyles.	
Selects teaching/learning strategies appropriate to the needs and characteristics of the individual or group.	Selects teaching/learning strategies appropriate to the needs and characteristics of the individual or group.	
Evaluates learning outcomes and modifies teaching/learning approaches and content accordingly.	Evaluates learning outcomes and modifies teaching/learning approaches and content accordingly.	
Demonstrates awareness of major developments and the potential application of current communication/health technologies in health care.	Keeps abreast of developments and potential applications of emerging communication/health technologies in health care.	

Health Promotion

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Maintains own health and personal fitness for/at work.	Maintains own health and personal fitness for/at work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacts of national and local health and social policies that affect specialty practice area ▪ Agencies – governmental and non-governmental – involved in providing services relevant specialty practice area ▪ National and local health promotion and prevention strategies in specialty practice area ▪ Knowledge of tools for health promotion and disease prevention suitable for use with individuals, groups and communities including screening, counselling and anticipatory guidance specific to specialty practice area ▪ Approaches to providing timely information and education about disease to patients/clients, family and others about treatments, the effects, and self-management strategies across the continuum of care ▪ Disease related changes that may lead to sensory, perceptual and cognitive limitations and memory changes affecting understanding and learning ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying and interpreting health and social policy relevant to area of specialist practice - Policy formulation - Working with policy makers - Working with patient/advocacy/specialty groups related to specialty practice area - Coalition building
Cooperates with nurses, other professionals and community groups in activities to reduce illness and promote healthy life styles and environments.	Cooperates with other professionals and community and specialty interest groups in activities to reduce illness and promote healthy life styles and environments in areas important to specialty practice.	
Incorporates into practice a perspective that takes account of the multiple determinants of health.	Incorporates into practice a perspective that takes account of the multiple determinants of health.	

Health Promotion (contd)

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning and implementing disease prevention and health promotion programmes (individual and community focused) targeting issues relevant to specialty practice area - Communication skills to promote exchange of information and positive partnerships/collaboration to meet care needs - Use of information technologies and community networks to communicate information - Educational programme evaluation ▪ Accessing and applying range of information and resources for use in developing and implementing patient and community education programmes

Assessment

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Gathers accurate and relevant objective and subjective data through systematic health and nursing assessments.	Gathers accurate and relevant objective and subjective data required for practice in specialty practice area through systematic health and nursing assessments, ordering diagnostic tests and procedures as permitted in the scope of specialist practice and legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Epidemiology, physiology, advanced pathophysiology, and psycho-sociology aspects relevant to specialty practice area ▪ Knowledge of techniques, tools, guidelines, laboratory investigations and methods to obtain comprehensive data about patient/client health status/condition necessary to formulate diagnoses ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advanced clinical assessment skills relevant to area – Interviewing and history taking – Physical examination – Psycho-social status and functioning – Use of standardised assessment tools – Diagnostic process – clinical reasoning, clinical judgement and decision making (integration and interpretation of data from different sources including interpretation of relevant laboratory and diagnostic test results)
Organises, synthesizes, analyses and interprets data from different sources to derive a nursing diagnosis and determine a care plan.	Organises, synthesizes, analyses and interprets data from different sources to derive nursing diagnoses and determine a care plan.	
Shares and documents findings accurately and in a timely manner complying with professional standards and organisational policies.	Shares and documents findings accurately and in a timely manner complying with professional standards and organisational policies.	

Planning

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Formulates a comprehensive care plan with identified care outcomes based on nursing diagnoses, findings from a nursing and health assessment, inputs from other health team members, and nursing practice standards.	Formulates a comprehensive care plan with identified care outcomes based on nursing diagnoses, findings from a nursing and health assessment, inputs from other health team members, and nursing practice standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Major treatment modalities, clinical management (including symptom and complications management) and care provision relevant to specialty practice area ▪ Pharmacology knowledge specific to specialty practice area ▪ Medication and treatment prescribing protocols applicable to specialist practice area ▪ Knowledge of services and community resources across the care continuum relevant to specialty practice area ▪ Databases and sources of evidence-based/best practice relevant to specialty practice area ▪ Nursing practice models ▪ Care planning across the continuum of care ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multidisciplinary care planning (disease management, symptom control, anticipating, preventing and dealing with complications, life style management, care coordination)
Applies critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills underpinned by knowledge of nursing and other disciplines to the care planning process.	Applies critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills underpinned by knowledge of the area of specialist practice and other disciplines to the care planning process.	
Establishes priorities for care in collaboration with other care providers and clients.	Establishes priorities for care in collaboration with other care providers and clients.	
Involves clients where possible in care planning ensuring that they receive accurate, understandable information on which to base consent for care.	Involves clients where possible in care planning ensuring that they receive accurate, understandable information on which to base consent for care.	
Involves an advocate when clients, families or carers request support or have limited abilities in decision-making, giving informed consent, or where there is a language barrier.	Involves an advocate when clients, families or carers request support or have limited abilities in decision-making, giving informed consent, or where there is a language barrier.	
Regularly reviews and revises the care plan, where possible in collaboration with other members of the health/social health team, and clients.	Regularly reviews and revises the care plan, where possible in collaboration with other members of the health/social health team, and clients.	
Maintains a current, accurate care plan and related records.	Maintains a current, accurate care plan and related records.	

Implementation

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Implements a range of procedures, treatments and interventions that fall within scope of practice for the registered nurse and are in accordance with nursing and best practice standards.	Implements a range of procedures, treatments and interventions that fall within scope of specialist practice and are in accordance with specialist nursing and best practice standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advanced clinical nursing skills related to specialty practice area – Management of emergency situations specific to specialty practice area
Documents interventions and client responses accurately and in a timely manner.	Documents interventions and client responses accurately and in a timely manner.	
Responds appropriately and in time to unexpected or rapidly changing situations.	Responds appropriately and in time to unexpected or rapidly changing situations.	
Responds immediately and appropriately to emergency and disaster situations, including launching life support procedures when necessary, and other emergency/ disaster procedures.	Responds immediately and appropriately to emergency and disaster situations taking a leadership role in triage and coordination of care for clients with specialty care needs.	

Evaluation

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Monitors and documents progress toward expected outcomes accurately and completely.	Monitors and documents progress toward expected outcomes accurately and completely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring and evaluation tools specific to specialty practice area
In consultation with clients, families and/or carers, and health team members, evaluates progress towards planned outcomes.	In consultation with clients, families and/or carers, and health team members, evaluates progress towards planned outcomes.	
Uses evaluation data to modify the care plan.	Uses evaluation data to modify the care plan.	

Therapeutic Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Initiates, develops and discontinues therapeutic relationships through the use of appropriate communication and interpersonal skills.	Initiates, develops and discontinues therapeutic relationships using a range of advanced communication and interpersonal skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disease related changes that may lead to sensory, perceptual and cognitive limitations and memory changes affecting communication ▪ Dynamics of conflict and negotiation processes, how these dynamics manifest themselves and how to achieve solutions that are mutually acceptable. ▪ Information technology applications to health care ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supportive communication skills to provide information about potentially distressing or embarrassing issues sensitively and responsively – Negotiation and conflict resolution skills – Information technology skill required for the care process, access information and support research activities
Maintains a relationship that respects the boundary between clients and self.	Maintains a relationship that respects the boundary between clients and self.	
Listens to others in an unbiased manner, respects points of view of others, and promotes the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives.	Listens to others in an unbiased manner, respects points of view of others, and promotes the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives.	
Communicates clear, consistent and accurate information verbally, or in written and electronic forms, that falls within professional responsibility and maintains confidence in care.	Communicates clear, consistent and accurate information verbally, or in written and electronic forms, that falls within professional responsibility and maintains confidence in care.	
Interacts in a manner that is respectful and culturally appropriate to the clients, family and/or carers from diverse cultural backgrounds.	Interacts in a manner that is respectful and culturally appropriate to the clients, family and/or carers from diverse cultural backgrounds.	
Facilitates access to information or refers request to the appropriate person.	Facilitates access to information or refers request to the appropriate person.	
Communicates and shares relevant information including views of clients, families and/or carers with other health team members involved in providing services.	Communicates and shares information including views of clients, families and/or carers with other health team members involved in providing services.	

Leadership and Management

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Advocates for and acts within span of control to create a positive working environment.	Advocates for and acts within span of control to create a positive working environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational and leadership models including the characteristics of effective leadership styles, leadership development and succession planning – Change models and change management – Familiar with concepts of governance and their implications for management – Conversant with concepts associated with vision, strategy, goals and objectives – Aware of the impact of positive practice environments, their characteristics and how they impact on service delivery, recruitment and retention – Conversant with local policy development, implementation and review processes ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problem identification, solutions generation using tools such as SWOT, stakeholder analysis and no directive questioning – Team building – Time management and deployment of resources – Complaints management and resolution – Translating policy into practice in specialty practice areas (e.g. developing protocols/ guidelines, job descriptions) – Planning and developing individual staff including assessment and appraisal – Contribute to committee work – Identify and communicate resource requirements – Monitor and evaluate services
Adapts leadership style and approaches to different situations.	Adapts leadership style and approaches to situations specific to the specialty practice area.	
Confronts conflict in a non-judgemental fashion, making effective use of communication skills and existing mechanisms to achieve resolution.	Confronts conflict in a non-judgemental fashion, making effective use of communication skills and existing mechanisms to achieve resolution.	
Contributes to team leadership by reinforcing goals so as to promote respect and confidence amongst the team.	Leads in a manner to inspire respect and confidence from others.	
Able to articulate own leadership contributions and support expectations of other team members.	As team leader and in line with current job description, clearly defines contributions and expectations required of team members.	
Prioritizes workload and manages time effectively.	Prioritizes workload, manages time effectively and allocates resources to optimise outcomes.	

Leadership and Management (contd)

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Contributes to the review and modification of current organisational and practice policies and procedures currently in force.	Contributes to the review and modification of current organisational and practice policies and procedures currently in force and provides leadership in developing and implementing organisational and practice policies and procedures specific to the specialty practice area.	
Contributes to education and professional development of students and colleagues in the workplace.	Contributes to the development and implementation of specialist education and professional development of students and colleagues in the workplace.	
Provides feedback, offers suggestions for changes and deals effectively with the impact of change in own practice or on the organisation.	Uses the change process to influence the introduction of innovations and adaptations to specialist practice and service organisation.	

Safe Environment

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Uses appropriate assessment tools to identify actual and potential risks to safety and reports concerns to the relevant authority.	Uses appropriate assessment tools to identify actual and potential risks to safety and security and reports concerns to the relevant authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is knowledgeable of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Special safety risks for client/patient related to specific health problems of patients/clients in specialist area – Evidence-based protocols/guidelines/processes of care designed to reduce adverse events – Concepts, elements, and methodologies that are involved in undertaking a risk assessment and management ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risk assessment and implementing risk management interventions
Takes timely action through the use of quality improvement risk management strategies to create and maintain safe care environment and meet national legislation and workplace health and safety requirements, policies and procedures.	Takes timely action through the use of quality improvement risk management strategies to create and maintain safe care environment and meet national legislation and workplace health and safety requirements, policies and procedures.	
Ensures the safe and proper storage, administration and recording of therapeutic substances.	Ensures the safe and proper storage, administration and recording of therapeutic substances.	
Administers and records medication, assesses side-effects and titrates dosages in accordance with authorised prescriptions.	In accordance with prescriptive authority selects/prescribes/administers medication, including accurate dosage, routes and frequency pattern, based upon accurate knowledge of the pharmacological effect, patient characteristics and concurrent therapies.	
Complies with infection prevention procedures and challenges breaches in other practitioners' practice.	Complies with infection prevention procedures and challenges breaches in other practitioners' practice.	
Knows responsibilities and procedures to follow in the event a disaster is declared.	Identifies and plans for specific measures necessary to deal with patients/clients in specialty practice area in the event of a disaster.	

Interprofessional Health Care

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Understands and values the roles, knowledge and skills of members of the health team in relation to own responsibilities.	Understands and values the roles, knowledge and skills of members of the health team in relation to own responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership and collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Principles, definitions of elements of successful partnership and collaborative practice – Practice models including models for partnership and collaborative practice ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Initiating and responding to referrals
Works collaboratively with other professionals in health care to enhance nursing and other health services being accessed by clients.	Works collaboratively with other professionals in health care to enhance nursing and other services offered in specialty practice area.	
Uses knowledge of effective inter- and intra-professional working practices.	Uses knowledge of effective inter- and intra-professional working practices.	
Presents and supports the views of clients, families and/or carers during decision-making by the inter-professional team.	Presents the views of clients, families and/or carers in decision-making by the inter-professional team and assists with negotiation of mutually agreed decisions.	
Refers clients to ensure patients/clients have access to best available interventions.	Refers clients and accepts referrals from other health care providers to ensure clients have access to best available intervention.	

Delegation and Supervision

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Delegates activities to others, according to ability, level of preparation, proficiency and legal scope of practice.	Delegates activities to others, according to ability, level of preparation, proficiency and legal scope of practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Role definition – Consulting skills
Accepts delegated activities in line with personal level of proficiency and legal scope of practice.	Accepts delegated activities in line with personal level of proficiency and legal scope of practice.	
Monitors and uses a range of supportive strategies including precepting when supervising and/or monitoring delegated care.	Monitors and uses a range of supportive strategies including precepting and mentoring when supervising and/or monitoring delegated care.	
Maintains accountability and responsibility when delegating aspects of care to others.	Maintains accountability and responsibility when delegating aspects of care to others.	
Contributes to policy and protocol development that relates to delegation of clinical responsibilities.	Contributes to policy and protocol development that relates to delegation of clinical responsibilities specific to specialty practice area.	

Enhancement of the Profession

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Promotes dissemination, use, monitoring and review of professional standards and best practice guidelines.	Promotes dissemination, use, monitoring and review of professional specialist standards and best practice guidelines and participates in developing and adapting standards to the practice context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How policy is made – process, reform, environment, policy makers ▪ Strategies for influencing national and local policies makers ▪ Professional networking ▪ Research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using research to improve practice and to develop policy, e.g. reading and interpreting research studies – Identifying research questions – The research process – Ethical issues related to research – Funding of research ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Writing a research proposal – Literature search skills – Critical appraisal of research in relation to clinical practice – Communicating research— public presentation, report writing, writing for publication – Advocacy (e.g. developing and delivering advocacy messages – lobbying, briefing notes, position papers, press releases, media interviews)
Promotes and maintains a positive image of nursing.	Promotes specialist nursing practice as an essential part of health service delivery.	
Acts as an effective role model for students and within the care team.	Acts as an effective role model for students and within the care team.	
Acts as a resource for students, other members of the health team and the public.	Acts as a resource in specialty practice area for students, other members of health team, health planners and the public.	
Values research in contributing to developments in nursing and uses findings as a means to improving standards of care.	Contributes to knowledge and practice development of the clinical nursing specialty through identifying and conducting research in areas of need.	
	Advocates for and participates in obtaining public, legal and employer recognition of specialist qualifications, title protection and related scope of practice.	
Scans practice environment and nursing literature to identify emerging trends and issues.	Scans practice environment and specialist nursing literature to identify emerging trends and issues.	
Engages in advocacy activities through the professional organisation to influence health and social care service policies and access to services.	Engages in advocacy activities through professional organisations to influence health and social care service policies and service provision important to the specialty practice area.	

Quality Improvement

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Follows evidence-based and best practice guidelines in the delivery of nursing practice.	Uses and contributes to research into the evidence base for safe, effective, efficient practice in specialty practice area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systematic review and clinical audit processes ▪ Best practice – identifying best practice and tools for sharing best practice ▪ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Carrying out a clinical audit
Participates in quality improvement and quality assurance procedures.	Uses systematic review to improve client experience and outcomes in specialty practice area.	

Continuing Education

Registered Nurse competencies	Nurse Specialist competencies	Knowledge and skills <i>in addition</i> to those acquired for practice as a registered nurse
Undertakes regular review of own practice by engaging in reflection, critical examination and evaluation and seeking peer review.	Undertakes regular review of own practice by engaging in reflection, critical examination and evaluation and seeking peer review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Processes of self assessment and peer review ▪ Professional portfolio – what, how and uses ▪ Performance appraisal – approaches, tools
Assumes responsibility for lifelong learning, own professional development and maintenance of competence.	Assumes responsibility for lifelong learning, own professional development and maintenance of competence.	
Takes opportunities to learn with others contributing to health care.	Participates in uni- and multidisciplinary teaching learning.	

Criteria Designating Nursing Specialties

1. The specialty defines itself as nursing and subscribes to the overall purpose, functions, and ethical standards of nursing.
2. The specialty practice is sufficiently complex and advanced so that it is beyond the scope of general nursing practice.
3. There is both a demand and a need for the specialty service.
4. The focus of the specialty is a defined population that demonstrates recurrent problems and phenomena that lie within the discipline and practice of nursing.
5. The specialty practice is based on a core body of nursing knowledge that is being continually expanded and refined by research. Mechanisms exist for supporting, reviewing, and disseminating research.
6. The specialty has established educational and practice standards that are congruent with those of the profession and are set by a recognised nursing body/ies.
7. The specialty adheres to the licensure/registration requirements for the general nurse.
8. Specialty expertise is obtained through a professionally approved advanced education programme that leads to a recognised qualification. The programme is administered by a nurse.
9. The specialty has a credentialing process determined by the profession or in accordance with the national practice for other professions. Sufficient human and financial resources are available to support this process.
10. Practitioners are organised and represented within a specialty association or a branch of the national nurses association.

These criteria were developed in 1992 from several sources: ICN 1987 discussion paper, *Specialization in Nursing*; Styles' list in *On Specialization: Towards a New Empowerment*; the Canadian Nurses Association's criteria for their certification programme; and feedback received from participants of the ICN Nursing Regulation Workshops.

Comparison of ICN Framework of Competencies with Selected Nurse Specialist Frameworks

ICN Framework of Competencies		Specialist Breast Nurse Competency Domains ¹	Nurse Specialist Competency Domains used by RCN Specialist Groups e.g. Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease ²		Specialist Cancer Nursing Competency Domains using the NHS KSF (level 6) ³	Older Adult Nursing Competency Domains ⁴
Professional, ethical, legal practice	Ethical practice		Multiple Sclerosis	Parkinson's Disease	Equality, diversity & rights Support equality and value diversity	Cultural & spiritual competence (Delivering patient care with respect to cultural and spiritual beliefs, and making health care resources available to patients from diverse cultures)
	Accountability		Accountability			
	Legal practice		Accountability Scope of practice, accountability for service demands, documentation, evidence based practice, informed consent			
Care provision & management	Promotion of health Assessment Planning Implementation	Supportive care Identify multiple physical, psychological, social, sexual and spiritual needs of clients throughout the continuum of breast cancer care, and to implement evidence-based supportive care interventions in a flexible and responsive manner, in the context of a collaborative multidisciplinary approach to care, to achieve optimal health outcomes for clients with breast cancer	Clinical management of MS Management of 4 phases of MS Knowledge of MS Causation, classification theories, pathology, management Personal planning & organisation Time management, organisation of work outcome measurement, cognitive impact	Case management Management through four stages Assessment Symptom management	Communication Develop and maintain communication with people about difficult matters and/or in difficult situations Health, safety & security Monitor and maintain health, safety of self and others	Health promotion, health projection, disease prevention & treatment (Synthesizes theoretical, scientific, and contemporary clinical knowledge for the assessment and management of both health and illness states)

¹ National Breast Cancer Centre (2005). Specialist Breast Nurse Competency Standards and Associated Educational Requirements, NSW, Australia. Available from www.nbcc.org.au/bestpractice/documents/SBN60ppFullReport.pdf

² UK Multiple Sclerosis Nurses Association, Multiple Sclerosis Trust & Royal College of Nursing (2003). Competencies for MS Specialist Nurses, Multiple Sclerosis Trust. Available from www.mstrust.org.uk/downloads/competencies_brochure.pdf and Royal College of Nursing & Parkinson's Disease Society (2005). Competencies: an integrated career and competency framework for nurses working in Parkinson's disease management..

³ Knowles G (2006). Advanced practice –cancer nurse specialist sustainability framework. (Unpublished).

⁴ Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative (2004). Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Nurse Specialist Competencies for Older Adult Care, American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the John A. Hartford Foundation. Available from www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/pdf/APNCompetencies.pdf

ICN Framework of Competencies		Specialist Breast Nurse Competency Domains	Nurse Specialist Competency Domains used by RCN Specialist Groups e.g. Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease		Specialist Cancer Nursing Competency Domains using the NHS KSF (level 6)	Older Adult Nursing Competency Domains
Care provision & management	Evaluation Therapeutic communication & interpersonal relations Safe environment Delegation & supervision Organisation of care Inter-professional health care	Collaborative care Planning, implementation and evaluation by ensuring the client and service providers are working effectively as a team and that those involved in a client's care have established secure and dependable relationships to meet client needs Coordinated care Facilitate a coordinated approach to care planning, implementation and evaluation by ensuring a comprehensive range of health and support services needed are delivered in a timely, flexible and efficient manner in response to client needs Information provision and education Provide comprehensive, specialised and individualised information to clients about the pathophysiology of breast cancer and its effects, treatment approaches, supportive care, and self-management strategies, using evidence-based educational strategies that are consistent with individual clinical circumstances, preferences, information and self-care needs	Multiple Sclerosis	Parkinson's Disease	Assessment & care planning Plan, deliver and evaluate care to address people's complex health and wellbeing needs Enablement to address health and well being needs Empower people to realise and maintain their potential in relation to health and wellbeing Provision of care to meet needs Plan, deliver and evaluate care to address people's complex health and wellbeing needs Assessment & treatment planning Assess physiological and/or psychological functioning and develop, monitor and review related Information collection & analysis Gather, analyse and report a limited range of data and information	Nurse-practitioner – patient relationship Demonstrates the personal, collegial, and collaborative approach which enhances effectiveness in providing patient care
			Relationship with people with MS and families Trust & self-management, advocacy, user service development and use Working with different health and social environments Integration and development of services, community/primary care etiquette) Teaching & sharing knowledge Development of educational programmes, teaching, use of evaluation tools, mentorship, Teaching people with MS, relationship with industry	Medicines management Assessing and managing complications Surgery: Developing expert practice in functional surgical management Providing support and advice to people with PD and carers		

ICN Framework of Competencies		Specialist Breast Nurse Competency Domains	Nurse Specialist Competency Domains used by RCN Specialist Groups e.g. Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease		Specialist Cancer Nursing Competency Domains using the NHS KSF (level 6)	Older Adult Nursing Competency Domains
Care provision & management			Multiple Sclerosis	Parkinson's Disease	Learning & development Enable people to learn and develop Interventions & treatment Plan, deliver and evaluate interventions and/or treatments	Managing & negotiating the health care delivery systems Achieve improved health outcomes for patients, communities, and systems through overseeing and directing the delivery of clinical services within an integrated system of health care Teaching-coaching function Skills of interpreting and individualizing therapies through the activities of advocacy, modelling, and tutoring. Recipients of teaching-coaching may include patients, families, nursing and/or other health personnel or systems of care
			Relationship with professionals Partnerships, influence & leadership, professional networking	Referral to a multidisciplinary team		

ICN Framework of Competencies		Specialist Breast Nurse Competency Standards	Nurse Specialist Competency Domains used by RCN Specialist Groups e.g. Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease		Cancer Nursing Specialist Practice using the NHS KSF	Older Adult Nursing Competency Domains
Professional development	Professional enhancement	Clinical leadership Advance and improve breast cancer care through a range of clinical leadership and professional activities	Multiple Sclerosis	Parkinson's Disease	Personal and people development Develop oneself and contribute to the development of others Service development Contribute to the improvement of services Quality Contribute to improving quality Development & innovation Testing and reviewing new models, methods, practices, products and equipment Capacity & capability Sustain capacity and capability	Professional role Advancing the profession and enhancing direct care and management. Implements critical thinking and builds collaborative, interdisciplinary relationships to provide optimal care to the patient Monitoring & ensuring the quality of health care practice Ensuring quality of care through consultation, collaboration, continuing education, certification, and evaluation
	Quality improvement		Research and audit using research Using research, doing research, patient trials, audit Professional & personal development Reflective practice, developing knowledge	Education and professional/personal development Research and audit Accountability		
	Continuing education					

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