

**For discussion on
20 August 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Health Services

Voluntary Scheme on Advanced and Specialised Nursing Practice

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the Voluntary Scheme on Advanced and Specialised Nursing Practice (“the Scheme”).

BACKGROUND

Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development

2. In 2012, the Government set up the Steering Committee on Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development (“the Steering Committee”) to review the healthcare manpower requirements of 13 healthcare professions which are subject to statutory regulation¹, as well as the training for healthcare professionals, promotion of professional development and improvement of regulatory framework.

3. For the nursing profession, the Steering Committee recognised the pivotal role played by nurses worldwide in revitalising healthcare systems through advanced nursing practice and enhanced clinical specialties, and suggested that the Government should consider introducing a specialist registration system for nurses and credentialing the specialist qualification.

Task Force on Specialisation of Nursing Practice

4. In the light of the Steering Committee’s recommendation and the industry’s appeal, the Government set up a Task Force on Specialisation of Nursing Practice (“the Task Force”) in September 2016, comprising

¹ The 13 healthcare professions are medical practitioners, dentists, dental hygienists, midwives, nurses, Chinese medicine practitioners, chiropractors, medical laboratory technologists, pharmacists, occupational therapists, optometrists, physiotherapists and radiographers.

members from the Hospital Authority (“HA”), the Department of Health, tertiary institutions and other key stakeholders of the nursing profession, to study the topic. In particular, the Task Force examined the needs of specialisation of nursing practice and explored its applicability to Hong Kong, having regard to overseas experience and local circumstances as well as the implications of nursing specialisation for the current nursing practices in both public and private sectors. Advanced and specialised nursing practice are an efficient and effective resource to address health care challenges. They can provide enhanced and expanded healthcare services and interventions in an advanced capacity, and hence influence clinical healthcare outcomes in individuals, families and communities.

The Scheme

5. As agreed by the Task Force in early 2018, the Food and Health Bureau (“FHB”) invited the Nursing Council of Hong Kong (“the Council”)² in April 2018 to establish and implement the Scheme with a view to advancing the professional competence of nurses in Hong Kong and paving the way for setting up a statutory regime of advanced / specialised nursing practice in the long run. In positive response to FHB’s invitation, the Council formed in April 2018 a Working Group on Advanced and Specialised Nursing Practice (“Working Group”) for taking forward the Scheme.

6. An Advanced Practice Nurse (“APN”) is one who has acquired, through additional education, the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded nursing practice. Given the complexity of advanced and specialised nursing practice, the Working Group held frequent meetings, usually on a monthly basis, and conducted extensive research on advanced nursing practice at both global and local levels. In early 2019, a two-month public consultation exercise on the implementation of the Scheme was conducted to gauge views from the public and major stakeholders of the profession. During the consultation, members of the profession expressed support and responded positively to the development of the Scheme. After duly considering comments and feedback received, the Working Group concluded that stakeholders supported the development and regulation of advanced and specialised nursing practice in Hong Kong.

² The Council is a statutory authority established under the Nurses Registration Ordinance (Cap. 164) and is responsible for the regulation of the nursing profession.

Common Core Competencies

7. In view that APNs should take up additional roles and possess competencies of a higher level compared to Registered Nurses (“RNs”) at entry level, a set of common core competencies for APNs was defined across different settings and specialties to set out the differences between a RN and an APN. Having reviewed various local and overseas reference documents, the Council decided to adopt the framework of the existing core competencies for RNs as the basis to establish the core competencies for APNs. The scope of core competencies of APNs is built on the following five competence areas required of RNs -

- (a) Professional, Legal and Ethical Nursing Practice;
- (b) Health Promotion and Health Education;
- (c) Management and Leadership;
- (d) Evidence-based Practice and Research; and
- (e) Personal and Professional Development.

Specific Core Competencies

8. In addition to the common core competencies of APNs, the Council decided that specific core competencies of APNs for individual specialties should also be developed. In this regard, the Council invited the Hong Kong Academy of Nursing (“HKAN”)³ and its colleges to formulate the core competencies of APNs for the 16 specialties under the Scheme. In May 2020, with the full support of HKAN and its colleges, 16 panels were formed to formulate the relevant core competencies for each specialty. By June 2021, all the core competencies of APNs for the following 16 specialties have been finalised and uploaded onto the Council’s website⁴ for reference by the public -

- (a) Cardiac nursing;
- (b) Community, primary and public health nursing;
- (c) Critical care nursing;
- (d) Education and research in nursing;
- (e) Emergency care nursing;
- (f) Gerontology nursing;
- (g) Gynaecology nursing;
- (h) Infection control in nursing;

³ HKAN is a non-statutory independent institution to organise, monitor, assess and accredit all nursing specialist training programmes and to oversee the provision of continuing specialist nursing education.

⁴ The website is https://www.nchk.org.hk/en/advanced_specialised_nursing_practice/core_competencies/index.html.

- (i) Management in nursing;
- (j) Medical nursing;
- (k) Mental health nursing;
- (l) Oncology nursing;
- (m) Orthopaedic nursing;
- (n) Paediatric nursing;
- (o) Perioperative and anaesthesia nursing; and
- (p) Surgical nursing.

LATEST DEVELOPMENT

9. As endorsed by the Council in May 2020, the Scheme is to be launched in batches. The sequence of launching the specialties and receiving applications would depend on the sequence of proposals received from the specialty panels and endorsed by the Council. A practising RN in Hong Kong meeting the following criteria is eligible to apply for recognition as an APN -

- (a) obtained a post-RN registration Clinical Master in Nursing / Health Science in the related specialty; or
- (b) obtained a post-RN registration Master degree in health related stream and completed the Post-registration Certificate Course / HA's Specialty Nurse Recognition Scheme Certificate / recognised in-service training for at least 80 hours; or
- (c) is a Fellow of HKAN or equivalent;

AND

- (d) possessed six years of full-time post-registration nursing experience immediately prior to his / her application in which at least the most recent four years must be serving in the related specialty area.

The requirements on postgraduate education at least at the master's level enables the APN to acquire additional in-depth knowledge, critical thinking and decision-making skills that provide the foundation for an advanced level of practice and decision making.

10. In January 2021, the Council launched the Scheme and invited applications for the first batch of specialties, namely Oncology Nursing, Management in Nursing and Gynaecology Nursing. As at early August 2021, applications have been accepted for 12 specialties, namely Oncology Nursing, Management in Nursing, Gynaecology Nursing, Medical Nursing, Orthopaedic Nursing, Paediatric Nursing, Emergency Care Nursing, Critical Care Nursing, Surgical Nursing, Cardiac Nursing, Infection Control in Nursing as well as Community, Primary and Public Health Nursing.

11. Applications for the remaining four specialties, namely Perioperative and Anaesthesia Nursing, Gerontology Nursing, Education and Research in Nursing as well as Mental Health Nursing, will be invited from October 2021, subject to further review of the actual circumstances.

12. Since the launch of the first batch of specialties in January 2021, around 86% of the applications were received from HA while around 14% were from private hospitals. The numbers of applications received and approved as at 2 August 2021 are tabulated below, with breakdown by specialty -

Specialty	No. of applications received		No. of applications approved	
	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector
Oncology Nursing	85	7	85	5
Management in Nursing	109	56	79	21
Gynaecology Nursing	7	2	7	2
Orthopaedic Nursing	128	0	70	0
Medical Nursing	239	20	165	0
Paediatric Nursing	0	3	0	0
Emergency Care Nursing	20	0	2	0
Total	588	88	408	28
Grand Total	676		436	

WAY FORWARD

13. The Scheme has been running smoothly thus far. It is anticipated that more applications will be received in the second half of 2021 when all specialties are open for applications. In order to encourage

eligible nurses to submit applications, the Chairman of the Council will conduct briefings for prospective applicants working in HA and the private sector.

14. After the successful implementation of the Scheme and the finalisation of guidelines and manuals on advanced nursing practice at the next stage, the Council will evaluate the effectiveness of the Scheme and submit recommendations to FHB on setting up a statutory registration system for APNs.

Food and Health Bureau
August 2021