

## **AORN White Paper: Clinical Nurse Leader**

### **Purpose Statement**

This document serves as a reference to define the role and educational preparation of the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) and identify applications for this role in perioperative practice.

### **Role Definition**

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN):

“ . . . the CNL is a leader in the health care delivery system across all settings in which health care is delivered, not just the acute care setting. The CNL functions within a microsystem and assumes accountability for the healthcare outcomes for a specific group of clients within a unit or setting through assimilation and application of research-based information to design, implement, and evaluate client plans of care. The CNL is a provider and a manager of care at the point of care to individuals and cohorts. The CNL designs, implements, and evaluates client care by coordinating, delegating, and supervising the care provided by the health care team, including licensed nurses, technicians, and other health professionals.” <sup>1(p5)</sup>

### **Educational Preparation**

1. The CNL pursues a Masters of Science in Nursing with a defined CNL track. Curriculum components include:
  - liberal education as the foundation;
  - professional education;
  - strong base in the physical and social science;
  - learning experiences in philosophy, the arts, and humanities;
  - professional values of caring, altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity, and social justice;
  - core competencies of critical thinking communication, assessment, nursing technology, and resource management; and

- core knowledge of health promotion, risk reduction and disease prevention, illness and disease management, ethics, human diversity, global health care, and health care systems and policy.<sup>2</sup>

2. The Clinical Nurse Leader is prepared as a generalist at the master's degree level. In addition to the competencies outlined in the AACN *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice*,<sup>3</sup> the CNL is prepared with the competencies delineated in the AACN's *Working Paper on the Role of the Clinical Nurse Leader*.<sup>1</sup>

### Perioperative Application

The AACN's defined characteristics for the CNL role follow with interpretative applications for perioperative practice:<sup>1</sup>

Clinical Nurse Leader	Examples of Perioperative Application
Clinician	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Uses evidence-based practice to provide/coordinate/evaluate direct patient care to individuals across the lifespan as RN circulator, in the scrub role, or as an RNFA (graduate of approved RNFA program).</li> </ul>
Outcomes Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Synthesizes data,<sup>1</sup> information, and knowledge to evaluate and achieve optimal perioperative client outcomes according to AORN Standards, Recommended Practices and Guidelines.</li> <li>▫ Assess practice effectiveness and efficiency.</li> </ul>
Client Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Assists perioperative patients and families achieve physical, psychosocial, and cultural needs.</li> <li>▫ Develops therapeutic relationships to ensure patients, families, and communities are well informed and included in care planning.</li> <li>▫ Protects the rights of patients to promote effective quality outcomes throughout the perioperative continuum of care.</li> </ul>
Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Teaches and mentors perioperative nursing professionals and other staff using adult learning methodologies.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Applies recognized patient teaching principles, current information, materials, and technologies to educate perioperative patients and their families.</li> </ul>
Information Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Incorporates information systems and technology for knowledge acquisition to improve health care outcomes at the point of care.</li> <li>▫ Documents and analyzes clinical data.</li> </ul>
Systems Analyst/Risk Anticipator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Analyzes and evaluates data sets to anticipate individual risk and designs strategies to modify risks, promote patient safety, and prevent medical errors.</li> <li>▫ Ensures systems meet the needs of the population served and are culturally relevant.</li> <li>▫ Assesses procedure and system effectiveness.</li> </ul>
Team Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Facilitates teamwork through delegation and management of perioperative resources.</li> <li>▫ Collaborates and consults with the interdisciplinary health care team to design, coordinate, and evaluate perioperative care outcomes.</li> <li>▫ Models perioperative professional practice.</li> <li>▫ Evaluates team function and care outcomes.</li> </ul>
Member of a Profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ "Advocates for professional standards of practice using organizational and political processes."</li> <li>▫ Seeks and maintains membership in professional organizations (eg, AORN, Sigma Theta Tau, ANA).</li> </ul>
Lifelong Learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Actively pursues personal and professional development and assumes responsibility for current practice and acquisition of new knowledge.</li> <li>▫ Seeks specialty certification (eg, CNOR) to demonstrate advanced perioperative nursing knowledge.</li> </ul>

Although the CNL is not an advanced practice role, it has been compared to the CNS role which has been commonly practiced in the perioperative setting. The following link provides similarities, differences, and complementarities between the role:

American Association of Colleges of Nursing, “Working Statement Comparing the Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>sm</sup> and Clinical Nurse Specialist Roles: Similarities, Differences and Complementarities.”  
<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/CNL/pdf/CNSComparisonTable.pdf>. Accessed September 28, 2006.

## Conclusion

The CNL role was created by the AACN to address the evolving complexities of professional nursing practice and in response to the nursing shortage, patient safety issues, and emerging health care challenges. Perioperative Registered Nurses have a professional responsibility to be knowledgeable about emerging practice roles that may be applied to the perioperative setting.

To obtain more information on the CNL curriculum, access the American Association of Colleges of Nursing document, “Preparing Graduates for Practice as a Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>sm</sup> Draft Curriculum Framework.” Available at:  
<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/CNL/pdf/curricfrmwrk.pdf> . Accessed September 28, 2006.

## References

1. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Working Paper on the Role of the Clinical Nurse Leader, May 2003, revised 2004. Available at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Publications/pdf/CNLDRAFT.pdf>. Accessed September 28, 2006.
2. Woods, NF. Leadership—not just for a few. *Policy, Politics, and Nursing Practice*. 2003;4:255-256.
3. American Association of Colleges of Nursing (1998). *Essential of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice*. Washington, DC: AACN.

## Recommended Readings

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. *Clinical Nurse Leader Competencies*, March 2006. Available at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/CNL/pdf/TVHCompetencies.pdf>. Accessed September 28, 2006.

Grindel, C. AACN presents the clinical nurse leader and the doctor in nursing practice roles: a benefit or a misfortune? *MEDSURG Nursing*. 2005;14(4):209-210.

National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists (NACNS). *NACNS Position Statement on the Clinical Nurse Leader, September 2005*. Available at [http://www.nacns.org/NACNS\\_Positionstatement\\_CNL\\_9\\_05\\_3\\_04.pdf](http://www.nacns.org/NACNS_Positionstatement_CNL_9_05_3_04.pdf). Accessed September 28, 2006.

Rusch, LM. Supporting clinical nursing leadership and professional practice at the unit level. *Nursing Leadership Forum*. 2004; 9(2):61-66.

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