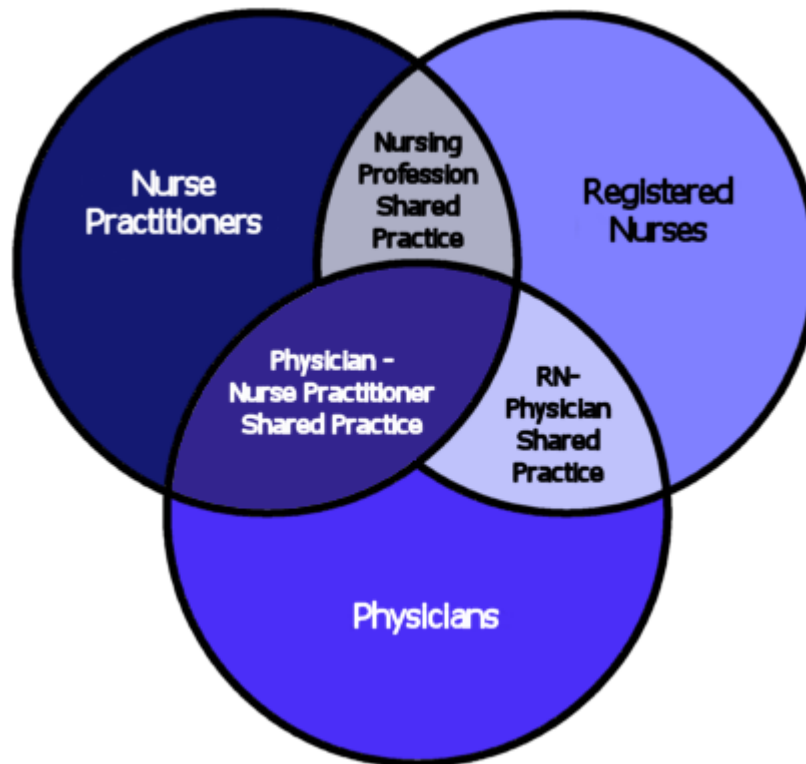


Registered Nurses

Working in Partnership with the Health Care Team

In 2003, government passed amendments to the *Health Professions Act* that included the repeal of the *Nurses (Registered) Act* so registered nurses and nurse practitioners could be regulated under the same rules as all other health professions. The new *Nurses (Registered) and Nurse Practitioners Regulation* sets out what registered nurses are authorized to do (scope of practice). The Regulation implements recommendations given to government by the Health Professions Council, an independent advisory body.

Physician - Nurse Shared Scope of Practice



What is the Health Professions Act?

The *Health Professions Act* provides the legal framework for self-governing health professions in the Province of British Columbia. Under this Act, government can pass regulations allowing health professions to regulate themselves in the public interest. The governing body is called a “College,” and is run by a board comprised of both elected members of the profession and appointed public representatives. The College ensures the protection of the public by setting educational and other requirements for entry to the profession, establishing standards of practice and ethics providing for quality assurance and where necessary, conducting investigations and disciplinary proceedings.

What was the benefit of bringing registered nurses under the *Health Professions Act*?

Bringing registered nurses and all other health professions under a common umbrella regulatory framework:

- provides consistency and fairness in requirements relating to governance structures and transparency, registration processes, inquiry and discipline matters, etc;
- counters perceptions of “hierarchy” among professions;
- enhances interdisciplinary practice;
- increases accessibility and consumer choice;
- improves cost effectiveness.

What did the Nurses (Registered) and Nurse Practitioners Regulation do?

The regulation brought registered nurses under the *Health Professions Act*. The RNABC became the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia with authority to regulate the practice of registered nurses and nurse practitioners. The regulation set out the scope of practice, including the reserved actions that registered nurses may perform, as well as the occupational titles they’re allowed to use.

What does the Regulation mean by “scope of practice”?

The **scope of practice** is a descriptive statement, in general terms, of what a health profession does and how it does it. The amendments to the *Health Professions Act* introduced a “shared scopes of practice” model. Under the old style of regulation, scopes of practice were often “exclusive” – they would set out what one profession could do and forbid other professions from doing those things unless they had specific authorization to do so. This system encouraged professional ‘protectionism’, which doesn’t reflect the reality of modern health care where many health professionals cooperate in a team approach, focused on the care of patients.

In the shared scope of practice model, the scope of practice of one profession may overlap with another’s.

What does the Regulation mean by “reserved action”?

Reserved actions are those which present such a significant risk of harm to patients, that they should be reserved to regulated health professionals. These include actions that, to protect the public, must be carried out by health professionals having the proper education and experience to do so. For example, reserved actions for nurse practitioners include such things as making a diagnosis and prescribing drugs.

The *Nurses (Registered) and Nurse Practitioners Regulation* defines which of the reserved actions RNs and NPs may perform.

How do reserved actions work for nurse practitioners?

The reserved actions for nurse practitioners are built upon the reserved actions for registered nurses. Under the regulation, registered nurses are assigned a basic set of reserved actions, which they will need to have received appropriate education on, in order to perform in their general practice. They are also permitted to perform a further set of reserved actions if they are acting under the order of a physician or other specified health professional. (Some registered nurses in specialized practice may not need an order to do certain of these things.)

Nurse practitioners can do everything a registered nurse can do but they also have their own list of reserved actions.

What does the Regulation mean by “standards, limits and conditions on practice”?

The Regulation states that, whatever activities a registered nurse or nurse practitioner carries out must be performed according to the standards, limits or conditions for practice, which the College establishes. These standards of practice will be able to define in a more detailed manner what the regulation can only address in very broad language. They will provide the actual guidance, which registered nurses will require in carrying out their day-to-day activities.

The standards, limits or conditions for practice of nurse practitioners has been established based on the recommendations of a committee specially created to define these. This NP Standards of Practice Committee has multi-disciplinary input from the professions of medicine and pharmacy, as well as public and government representation.