



**KENTUCKY BOARD OF NURSING**  
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**ADVISORY OPINION STATEMENT**

**ROLES OF NURSES IN PSYCHIATRIC-MENTAL HEALTH NURSING PRACTICE**

The Kentucky Board of Nursing is authorized by Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) Chapter 314 to regulate nurses, nursing education and practice, promulgate regulations and to issue advisory opinions on nursing practice, in order to assure that safe and effective nursing care is provided by nurses to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

The Kentucky Board of Nursing issues advisory opinions as to what constitutes safe nursing practice. As such, an opinion is not a regulation of the Board and does not have the force and effect of law. It is issued as a guideline to licensees who wish to engage in safe nursing practice, and to facilitate the delivery of safe, effective nursing care to the public.

**Opinion:** Roles of Nurses in Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing Practice

**Approved Date:** 10/1985

**Revised:** 1/1993; 4/1995; 2/2005; 4/2007; 2/2013; 2/2017; 12/2023

**Editorial Revision:** 1/2011; 5/2012; 5/2018

**Accountability and Responsibility of Nurses**

In accordance with KRS 314.021(2), nurses are responsible and accountable for making decisions that are based upon the individuals' educational preparation and current clinical competence in nursing, and requires licensees to practice nursing with reasonable skill and safety. Nursing practice should be consistent with the *Kentucky Nursing Laws*, established standards of practice, and be evidence based.

**Rationale for Advisory Opinion**

The Kentucky Board of Nursing has received numerous inquiries regarding the roles of registered nurses in psychiatric-mental health nursing practice. The Board issued the following advisory opinion to address the role of nurses in psychiatric-mental health settings, dispensing of medications, and safety searches.

**Nursing Interventions identified in this Advisory Opinion Statement include:**

- **The Role of Nurses in the performance of:**
  - Psychotherapy
  - Dispensing Medication to Inmates
  - Patient Safety Searches
  - Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS)

**Educational Preparation and Clinical Competency**

Pursuant to KRS 314.021(2) all nurses are held responsible and accountable for making decisions that are based upon the individual's educational preparation and current clinical competence. One method for demonstrating educational preparation and clinical competence is through obtaining relevant certifications within a specialty area. Another method would be to create a portfolio of trainings, workshops, and continuing education that demonstrates the acquisition of additional knowledge and clinical competency in the specialty area.

**Advisory Opinion: Psychotherapy**

Psychiatric-mental health nursing is the nursing practice specialty committed to promoting mental health through the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of behavioral problems, mental disorders, and comorbid conditions across the lifespan.

After review of the statutes governing registered nursing practice, advanced practice registered nursing practice, licensed practical nursing practice, Scope and Standards of Practice Psychiatric - Mental Health Nursing (2022), and the knowledge and skills required to perform psychiatric-mental health nursing functions, the Kentucky Board of Nursing issued the following advisory opinion:

The performance of psychotherapy (individual, couples, group and family therapy) is within the scope of practice of the registered nurse who is educationally prepared and clinically competent at the masters or doctoral degree level and certified in psychiatric-mental health nursing<sup>1</sup> (Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, 2022). It is within the scope of practice of the advanced practice registered nurse, certified in psychiatric-mental health nursing (APRN-PMH) to assume independent responsibility for a primary therapist role.

It is within the scope of registered nursing practice for the registered nurse, who is not prepared at the master's or doctoral degree level, to participate and assist in the assessment, nursing diagnosis, outcomes identification, planning, implementation, coordination of care, health teaching and health promotion of the healthcare consumer. The performance of other nursing care functions, including, but not limited to, counseling (individual, group, couples, and family counseling) and management of the therapeutic milieu, are within the scope of registered nursing practice. Counseling interventions include communication and interviewing techniques, problem-solving activities, crisis intervention, stress management, supportive skill building and educational groups, relaxation techniques, assertiveness training, and conflict resolution (Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, 2022).

"Psychotherapy denotes a formally structured relationship between the therapist (APRN-PMH) and the healthcare consumer for the explicit purpose of effecting negotiated outcomes. This treatment approach to mental disorders is intended to alleviate emotional distress or symptoms, to reverse or change maladaptive behaviors, and to facilitate personal growth and development ..." (Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> A registered nurse who holds himself or herself out as a clinical nurse specialist or is known as a clinical nurse specialist shall be required to be licensed as an advanced practice registered nurse if his or her practice includes the performance of advanced practice registered nursing procedures. [201-KAR 20:056 (10)]

A registered nurse who practices psychiatric-mental health nursing should demonstrate competence including specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities obtained through education and experience in caring for persons with mental health issues, mental health problems, psychiatric disorders, and co-occurring psychiatric and substance use disorders (Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, 2022).

Registered nurses who perform psychiatric-mental health nursing functions should perform these functions according to a written facility and nursing policies and procedures which are consistent with the definition of registered nursing practice [KRS 314.011(6)].

For guidelines on the roles of licensed practical nurses see KBN Advisory Opinion Statement #27 Components of Licensed Practical Nursing Practice.

### **Advisory Opinion: Scope of Practice Dispensing Medications to Inmates**

It is within the scope of practice for nurses practicing in a correctional facility to provide patient specific medications to incarcerated patients who have a current prescription upon their release. This should be performed in accordance with facility policies and procedures.

### **Advisory Opinion: Patient Safety Searches**

A safety search of a patient is within the scope of practice for the nurse, when clinically indicated and per facility protocol. A safety search should be conducted per facility policy and when there is an inherent risk to the patient, staff, or the public safety. Appropriate clinical judgment, justification, and professionalism should be used to ensure an environment of safety for the patient, staff, and the public while maintaining the patient's dignity and privacy.

The act of a safety search may be uncomfortable for the patient and the nurse should strive to maintain a therapeutic environment by explaining to the patient why the safety search is warranted. When possible, the decision to perform a safety search should be determined by the multi-disciplinary team and performed by two staff members. A nurse who performs a safety search should be educationally prepared and clinically competent to perform the task.

After the safety search has been completed, the patient should be offered a debriefing to support the nurse-patient relationship.

### **Advisory Opinion: Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS)**

The Board reviewed a request regarding the scope of practice of an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNP) to perform rTMS therapy. rTMS is an FDA approved treatment for patients with depression that have not benefitted from antidepressant therapy.

APRNs may be authorized to perform additional acts due to training and experience, such as prescribing treatment, devices, and order diagnostic tests pursuant to KRS 314.011(8). Upon review and discussion at their April 2022 meeting, the Board issued an opinion, that:

It is within the scope of practice of an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner (PMHNP) who has a credential in the use of rTMS and is educationally prepared possessing an extensive background in brain physiology received during completion of a training program in psychiatry and/or neurology and clinically competent to practice transcranial magnetic stimulation.

### **Determining Scope of Practice**

KRS 314.021(2) holds all nurses individually responsible and accountable for the individual's acts based upon the nurse's education and experience. Each nurse must exercise professional and prudent judgment in determining whether the performance of a given act is within the scope of practice for which the nurse is both licensed and clinically competent to perform. In addition to this advisory opinion statement, the Kentucky Board of Nursing issued Advisory Opinion Statement #41 RN/LPN Scope of Practice Determination Guidelines which contains the KBN Decision-Making Model for Determining Scope of Practice for RNs/LPNs, and published the APRN Scope of Practice Decision Making Model providing guidance to nurses in determining whether a selected act is within an individual nurse's scope of practice now or in the future. A copy of the KBN Decision-Making Model for Determining Scope of Practice for RNs/LPNs may be downloaded from the Board's website <https://kbn.ky.gov/General/Documents/aos41-rn-lpn-scope-of-practice-determination-guidelines.pdf> and a copy of the APRN guidelines may be downloaded from the Board's website <https://kbn.ky.gov/General/Documents/aprn-scope-of-practice-decision-making-model.pdf>

### **Applicable Statutes from the Kentucky Nursing Laws**

KRS 314.011(10) defines "licensed practical nursing practice" as:

...The performance of acts requiring knowledge and skill such as are taught or acquired in approved schools for practical nursing in:

- a) The observing and caring for the ill, injured, or infirm under the direction of a registered nurse, advanced practice registered nurse, physician assistant, a licensed physician, or dentist;
  - b) The giving of counsel and applying procedures to safeguard life and health, as defined and authorized by the board;
  - c) The administration of medication or treatment as authorized by a physician, physician assistant, dentist, or advanced practice registered nurse and as further authorized or limited by the board which is consistent with the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of licensed practical nurses;
  - d) Teaching, supervising, and delegating except as limited by the board; and
- a) The performance of other nursing acts which are authorized or limited by the board and which are consistent with the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses' Standards of Practice or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of registered nurses.

KRS 314.011(6) defines "registered nursing practice" as:

...The performance of acts requiring substantial specialized knowledge, judgment, and nursing skill based upon the principles of psychological, biological, physical, and social sciences in the application of the nursing process in:

- a) The care, counsel, and health teaching of the ill, injured or infirm;
- b) The maintenance of health or prevention of illness of others;
- c) The administration of medication and treatment as prescribed by a physician, physician assistant, dentist, or advanced practice registered nurse and as further authorized or limited by the board, and which are consistent either with American Nurses' Association Scope and Standards of Practice or with standards of practice established by nationally accepted organizations of registered nurses. Components of medication administration include, but are not limited to:

1. Preparing and giving medications in the prescribed dosage, route, and frequency, including dispensing medications only as defined in subsection (17)(b) of this section;
  2. Observing, recording, and reporting desired effects, untoward reactions, and side effects of drug therapy;
  3. Intervening when emergency care is required as a result of drug therapy;
  4. Recognizing accepted prescribing limits and reporting deviations to the prescribing individual;
  5. Recognizing drug incompatibilities and reporting interactions or potential interactions to the prescribing individual; and
  6. Instructing an individual regarding medications;
- d) The supervision, teaching of, and delegation to other personnel in the performance of activities relating to nursing care; and
- e) The performance of other nursing acts which are authorized or limited by the board, and which are consistent either with American Nurses' Association Standards of Practice or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of registered nurses.

KRS 314.011(8) defines "advanced practice registered nursing practice" as:

"Advanced practice registered nursing" means the performance of additional acts by registered nurses who have gained advanced clinical knowledge and skills through an accredited education program that prepares the registered nurse for one (1) of the four (4) APRN roles; who are certified by the American Nurses' Association or other nationally established organizations or agencies recognized by the board to certify registered nurses for advanced practice registered nursing as a certified nurse practitioner, certified registered nurse anesthetist, certified nurse midwife, or clinical nurse specialist; and who certified in at least one (1) population focus. The additional acts shall, subject to approval of the board, include but not be limited to prescribing treatment, drugs, devices, and ordering diagnostic tests. Advanced practice registered nurses who engage in these additional acts shall be authorized to issue prescriptions for and dispense nonscheduled legend drugs as defined in KRS 217.905 and to issue prescriptions for but not to dispense Schedules II through V controlled substances as classified in KRS 218A.020, 218A.060, 218A.080, 218A.100, and 218A.120, under the conditions set forth in KRS 314.042 and regulations promulgated by the Kentucky Board of Nursing on or before August 15, 2006. The performance of these additional acts shall be consistent with the certifying organization or agencies' scopes and standards of practice recognized by the board by administrative regulation.

KRS 314.021(2) holds all nurses responsible and accountable for making decisions that are based upon the individuals' educational preparation and experience in nursing.

### Resource

[Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice](#). 3rd Ed. (2022). Silver Spring.