

Clinical Nurse Specialist

What is a Clinical Nurse Specialist?

A Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) is an expert registered nurse (RN) with an advanced degree, practicing in a specialized area of nursing. A CNS provides direct care to patients with complex needs, acts as a consultant, researcher and provides education and guidance for staff nurses. They facilitate improvements in health care delivery systems that improve patient care, shorten hospital stays, decrease visits to the emergency room, reduce hospital costs, reduce medical complications and improve patient satisfaction. Their specialty may take place in a certain setting (e.g. hospital, clinic, critical care, home health), population (e.g. pediatrics, geriatrics), medical problem (e.g. craniosynostosis, neoplasms), or type of care (e.g. neurosurgical). Program management for the craniosynostosis population would be an example of a CNS role.

Educational Preparation

Clinical Nurse Specialists are RNs who hold a Master's or Doctoral degree from a nationally accredited nursing program that provides broad-based knowledge as well as specialty knowledge. Some certification examinations are available for CNSs, however, certification exams do not exist for most of the specialties (e.g. pediatric neurosurgery). The Master's degree is the credential for entry as a CNS.

Licensure

Licensure is granted by the individual's state board of nursing and the CNS must meet those requirements. They must also maintain a current RN license.

Prescriptive Authority

A CNS is authorized to prescribe medications or pharmaceuticals if he/she has met the state requirements for prescriptive authority. Individual states vary in their requirements and prescriptive authority may not be necessary for all CNS roles.

For more information on the role of the Clinical Nurse Specialist:

www.nacns.org

Fulton, J.S. (2002). Defining our practice. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, 16(4), 167-168.

Lyon, B. (2004). Model rules and regulations for cns title protection and scope of practice. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, 18(4), 178-179.

National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists. (2004). *Statement on clinical nurse specialist practice and education*. Harrisburg, PA: Author.

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