

REGULATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL NURSE APPLICANTS INTO THE CANADIAN HEALTH SYSTEM

CNA POSITION

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) believes in the following principles¹ with respect to the regulation and integration of international nurse applicants into the Canadian health system. CNA recognizes that the responsibility to uphold these principles lies with multiple parties and that an evaluative framework is necessary to ensure that the principles are being adhered to.

Principle #1 – Focus: The primary objective of Canadian nursing regulatory authorities when assessing the eligibility of internationally educated nurses for licensure/registration is to ensure that nurses being granted a license or registration to practise nursing² possess the competencies³ to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing practice. Internationally educated nurses need to be able to demonstrate that they have substantially equivalent nursing competency and language proficiency as well as sufficient cultural understanding of the new country and health care environment to provide safe, competent and ethical care to the Canadian public.

Principle #2 – Consistency: Requirements for initial licensure/registration of internationally educated nurses should be consistent and equivalent across Canada. They should also be consistent and equivalent with requirements for nurses educated in Canada. Mechanisms to determine equivalency need to be in place and agreed upon.

Principle #3 – Fairness and access: The process of assessment to determine eligibility for nursing licensure/registration should be fair, timely and transparent. The process must provide and must be seen to provide just treatment for those seeking nursing licensure/registration. Applicants are entitled to information as to the status of their applications and the basis for decisions related to licensure/registration.

Principle #4 – Competencies and credentials: The assessment for licensure/registration using various strategies (e.g., prior learning assessment and recognition) should consider internationally educated nurses' competencies and experience as well as educational credentials and English/French proficiency requirements.

Principle #5 – Disclosure: Internationally educated nurses seeking to work in Canada are entitled to information on the separate and distinct processes for applying for: a) provincial or territorial nursing licensure/registration; b) Canadian immigration; and c) nursing employment. This information should be made available to them before coming to Canada.

¹ The principles are adopted from the Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators (CNNAR) and the descriptions reflect nursing's identity.

² Nursing practice refers to practice in all four domains (i.e., clinical practice, administration, education and research) and includes practice in varying environments and degrees of complexity.

³ The integrated knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes and judgment required of an entry-level registered nurse (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2004a, p. 16).



Principle #6 – Multiple responsibilities and collaboration: The successful integration of internationally educated nurses into Canada requires collaboration amongst numerous parties – the international applicant, federal/provincial/territorial governments (and departments within), employers, nursing unions, educators, regulatory bodies and the public (including immigrant support agencies).

BACKGROUND

The nursing workforce around the world has become increasingly mobile. As a result, there are growing numbers of internationally educated nurses seeking registration and employment in Canada.

The employment of internationally educated nurses holds a number of benefits for the Canadian health system such as the filling of nursing vacancies by educated, experienced and often specialized nurses. Internationally educated nurses may be from culturally diverse backgrounds, which is particularly important in a country such as Canada, whose citizens are from a multitude of ethnocultural backgrounds.⁴

A nurse from another country must complete a number of separate and distinct processes to work in Canada. These are the visa/immigration process, which is under the jurisdiction of the federal or provincial/territorial governments; the licensure/registration process, which is carried out by the provincial or territorial nursing regulatory bodies; and the hiring process, which is conducted by individual employers.

The nursing regulatory bodies, given the authority to self-regulate under legislated acts, are charged with the responsibility of assessing eligibility for initial licensure/registration of nurses from diverse educational and experiential backgrounds. Regulators must provide fair and appropriate assessments while maintaining their mandates given by legal statute to protect the public from unsafe and unprofessional practice.

Internationally educated nurses may experience challenges in obtaining licensure/registration and achieving cultural integration. They may experience difficulty in the timely obtaining of necessary documentation to support their application for licensure/registration and meeting language proficiency, educational and competency requirements, including passing the national licensure/registration examination.⁵ They may also experience professional practice issues related to integrating into the professional workplace, knowing what it means to be a nurse in Canada and working in the Canadian health system.⁶

International migration of nurses may also have adverse effects on health care quality in countries being seriously depleted of their nursing workforce. CNA recognizes the right of individual nurses to migrate and confirms the potential beneficial outcomes of multicultural practice and learning opportunities supported by migration.⁷ However, CNA acknowledges the adverse effect that international migration may have on health care quality in countries seriously depleted of their nursing workforce. CNA does not support unethical recruitment of registered nurses from countries who currently are or will be experiencing a shortage. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) position statement on ethical recruitment denounces unethical recruitment practices and calls for a “regulated recruitment process based on ethical principles that guide informed decision-making.”⁸ This position statement, which has been endorsed by CNA, addresses such issues as effective human resources planning, appropriate hiring and employment practices, and the principles of freedom from discrimination. It also addresses effective orientation, mentoring and supervision for migrating nurses and credible nursing regulation, in which nursing legislation authorises the regulatory body to determine nurses’ standards of education, competencies and standards of practice.

⁴ (Canadian Nursing Advisory Committee, 2002)

⁵ (Griffiths, 2001; Hawthorne, 2001; Osborne, 2002; Rivers & Associates, 2000)

⁶ (Griffiths, 2001; Osborne, 2002)

⁷ (CNA, 2004, March)

⁸ (International Council of Nurses, 2001)

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In addition to endorsing the ICN position statement, CNA has addressed issues related to internationally educated nurses and nurse migration in a number of ways. The CNA position statement on international trade and mobility addresses the mobility rights of individual nurses and their need to seek information and orientation on the cultural, social, political and professional issues of the new country.⁹

CNA recognizes that it is essential for internationally educated nurses to have access to timely information as well as tools and resources (e.g., transition courses) to assist them in meeting regulatory requirements such as demonstrating language proficiency and passing the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE). Assistance should also be made available with respect to achieving successful clinical and cultural integration into the Canadian health care environment. In 2004, CNA began offering one such tool, the *LeaRN* CRNE Readiness Test, an online simulated CRNE in a shortened format. This test will assist international nurse applicants to assess their readiness to write the national exam. As it is an online test, it is accessible to international applicants while they are still outside Canada. CNA also provides resources that can assist internationally educated nurses to understand the role of the professional nurse in Canada such as the CNA *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*,¹⁰ which sets out the ethical behaviors expected of registered nurses in Canada as well as *Everyday Ethics: Putting the Code into Practice*,¹¹ which helps nurses apply the code.

CNA has also developed a regulatory framework for the integration of international applicants.¹² The framework recognizes that public protection must be maintained and also recognizes that internationally educated nurses must be provided with the best opportunity to achieve their full potential in practising their chosen profession in this country. The framework identifies the infrastructure needed to assist internationally educated nurses to meet regulatory requirements and to make the transition into the Canadian health system.

The framework also identifies the need for a consistent national approach to the assessment of credentials and competencies, language proficiency and other regulatory requirements. CNA is currently working with nursing regulators (registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses and registered/licensed practical nurses), governments, educators, employers, unions and internationally educated nurses to examine the regulatory processes across Canada.

CNA is a member of the Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators (CNNAR). CNNAR is a network of national organizations whose members are provincial and territorial regulatory organizations that are responsible for the self-regulation of professions and occupations. CNNAR members acknowledge the importance of recognizing the credentials, competencies and experiences of internationally educated professionals. In March 2004, as part of a presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 12 member organizations¹³ of CNNAR put forward six principles with respect to international applicants.¹⁴ CNA, as one of the member organizations who developed and agreed to these six principles, believes that a principle-based approach is required for the regulation and integration of international nurse applicants. These principles form the basis of CNA's position with respect to international nurse applicants.

Approved by the CNA Board of Directors, March 2005

⁹ (CNA, 2000)

¹⁰ (CNA, 2002)

¹¹ (CNA, 2004b)

¹² (Barry, Sweatman, Little, & Davies, 2003)

¹³ The 12 organizations represented in the presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration were the Agricultural Institute of Canada, Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations, Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, Canadian Council of Practical Nurse Regulators, Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists, Canadian Federation of Chiropractic Regulatory Boards, Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada and National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities.

¹⁴ (Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators, 2004, March)

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Also see:

Related CNA Position Statements:

Accountability: CNA Regulatory Framework (2005)

Nursing Professional Regulatory Framework (2001)

Promoting Culturally Competent Care (2004)

Staffing Decisions for the Delivery of Safe Nursing Care (2003)