

Is the Role of Circulating in an OR within the Scope of Practice for the RPN?

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Prepared and Edited by the Operating Room Practice Council,
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The focus of care at St. Joseph's Health Centre's Operating Room is for Ambulatory, Short Stay patients. RPN's and RN's are part of the team providing patient care. Redesign upskilled the RPN at the London, Ontario Health Center to function in the Circulating Role. Role Clarity was underway at SJHC. The purpose of Role Clarity was to guide units within the Health Center in choosing the appropriate assignment for RNs, RPNs, and Attendants. The Operating Room Practice Council systematically and respectfully problem solved the question: Is the role of circulating in an Operating Room within the scope of practice for the RPN?

Abstract

Role Clarity was a focal point for discussion by the St. Joseph's Health Centre (SJHC) OR Practice Council. The question: "Is the role of circulating within the scope of practice for the Registered Practical Nurse (RPN)?" was tabled. Practice Council respectfully and systematically problem solved this question, considering factors as outlined in the Decision Guide for determining the Appropriate Category of Care Provider, issued by the College of Nurses of Ontario in March 1997. The question was analysed and all involved parties reached consensus. A decision followed demonstrating that the role of the circulating nurse exceeds the scope of practice for the RPN. The RPN cannot fulfil the role in its entirety. This decision resulted in a change of practice at SJHC.

Method

The OR Practice Council, consisting of RN's, RPN's and Attendants, Nurse Educator, Team Leader Manager analysed the data below to best answer the question: *Is the role of circulating in an Operating Room within the scope of practice for the RPN?*

The document, "A Decision Guide - Determining the Appropriate Category of Care Provider", CNO, Guide, March 1997), from the College of Nurses of Ontario, used in hospital-wide role clarity was applied to the Operating Room setting. This document described overall patient care requirements, in a given situation.

1. Overall Care Requirements:

- Complexity of Care Needs,
- Predictability of Clients Condition,
- Cognitive Requirements,
- Technical Requirements, and
- Level and Range of Potential Outcomes.

2. Circumstances:

- Level of Autonomy Required,
- Availability of Resources to Consult or Intervene, and
- Opportunity to maintain Competence.
- CNO practice advisers were contacted to provide clarity and direction via Telephone Conferences.
- Other Health Center's were researched as to their practice.
- Global Principles of Role Clarity were upheld.
- Literature search. See References on final page.

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These charts represent the range of situations in which RPN's may practice. RPN's may provide care when identified overall care requirements and circumstances fall within the limits of practice (white areas) as defined in one of the following charts.

Only expert RPN's practice at the limits.

If a factor level falls into a shaded area, the situation is beyond the limits of practice for all RPN's.

(Please note the charts represent care requirements applicable in the OR and that other combinations of practice limits for RPN do exist.)

White boxes define limits of practice.

Shaded boxes exceed limits of practice.

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Only expert RN's practice at the limits.

If a factor level falls into a shaded area, the situation is beyond the limits of practice for all RN's.

Overall Care Requirements				Circumstances			
COMPLEXITY OF CARE NEEDS	PREDICTABILITY OF CONDITION	COGNITIVE REQUIREMENTS	TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS	LEVEL AND RANGE OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	AUTONOMY	AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO CONSULT / INTERVENE	OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN COMPETENCE
Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Immediately	High
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Readily	Medium
High	Low	High	High	High	High	Not Readily	Low

▲ RPN Limits of Practice ▼

Overall Care Requirements				Circumstances			
COMPLEXITY OF CARE NEEDS	PREDICTABILITY OF CONDITION	COGNITIVE REQUIREMENTS	TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS	LEVEL AND RANGE OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	AUTONOMY	AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO CONSULT / INTERVENE	OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN COMPETENCE
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Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Immediately	High
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Readily	Medium
High	Low	High	High	High	High	Not Readily	Low

▲ RN Limits of Practice ▼

Overall Care Requirements				Circumstances			
COMPLEXITY OF CARE NEEDS	PREDICTABILITY OF CONDITION	COGNITIVE REQUIREMENTS	TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS	LEVEL AND RANGE OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	AUTONOMY	AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO CONSULT / INTERVENE	OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN COMPETENCE
Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Immediately	High
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Readily	Medium
High	Low	High	High	High	High	Not Readily	Low

Key Learnings

- The more complex and unpredictable the environment the higher the category of care provider needed to provide the full range of potential care requirements, assess changes, re-establish priorities and recognize the need for additional resources as required. The Operating Room was a frequently cited example of such an environment.
- Each role has a definite part to play. The caregiver cannot and should not be expected to pick up the pieces of others roles, that don't fulfill the needs of the situation.
- The circulating nurse must be ready to fulfill the activities required if the unexpected (not probable, but possible) negative outcome occur.
- Cognitive requirements may be high if there is an urgency to recognize and deal with potential outcomes, or if Signs and Symptoms of patient responses are subtle.
- When looking at the decision guide from the CNO, if one of the eight factor levels falls outside the identified areas, the situation is beyond the limits of practice for all members of this category, therefore another care provider must carry the responsibility for it.
- The limits of practice identify the maximum expectations, only expert members practice at the limits.

Results

1. Overall care requirements

a. Complexity of Care Needs:

In the Elective Ambulatory Care population most needs are readily identifiable. Conversely, the Emergency patient or the unstable ICU patient has care needs that are more complex.

Medium - Elective
High - Emergency/unstable

b. Predictability of the Clients Condition:

Any surgery carries some degree of unpredictability. A number of identifiable changes could occur for the *elective ambulatory patient*. The *unstable elective patient* or the *emergency patient*, would be categorized low.

Medium - Elective
Low - Emergency/ Unstable elective

Cognitive Requirements of the Circulating Role ►

c: What are the Cognitive Requirements for the responsibility, activity? (see pie chart)

The circulating role involves a high degree of clinical decision making. In some cases the urgency of the situation is such that there is no time to access a resource. It should be noted that a number of negative outcomes could occur intraoperatively. Example malignant hyperthermia, hypovolemia, neurogenic shock. Each negative outcome has a unique set of subtle signs and symptoms that need to be *recognized*, along with unique interventions that need to be *anticipated, communicated, co-ordinated, prioritized and implemented*. The circulating nurse must *anticipate* the need and *manage* negative outcomes. A high degree of clinical decision making is required while the surgeon and the anaesthetist are busy with their own roles.

High - Level of critical thinking required.

d: Technical Requirements

Highly complex equipment is used in the Operating room requiring high technical troubleshooting skills, requiring immediate problem solving skills and assessment.

High - complex equipment /multiple steps.

e: Level and range of potential negative outcomes

There is always a chance for a negative outcome during surgery or anaesthetic. For the *elective* patient whose current health status is known there are a number of identified outcomes. The unstable elective or emergency patient would be categorized high.

Medium - elective

High - emergency/ unstable elective

2. Circumstances

f. Level of Autonomy Required:

The role of circulating is an established role. The circulating nurse works within the role. An ongoing assessment and evaluation of the clients condition is performed and a resource person is notified according to established criteria.

Medium - established role/criteria

g. Availability of resources to consult or intervene:

changes depending on time of day, day of the week, classification either RN or RPN. The majority of elective cases are completed on the day shift, when there is usually a resource person readily available to consult or intervene. *Note, that if an RN is *circulating* and readily available, then the RPN can assist the RN in certain aspects of the circulating role. See Step 3*

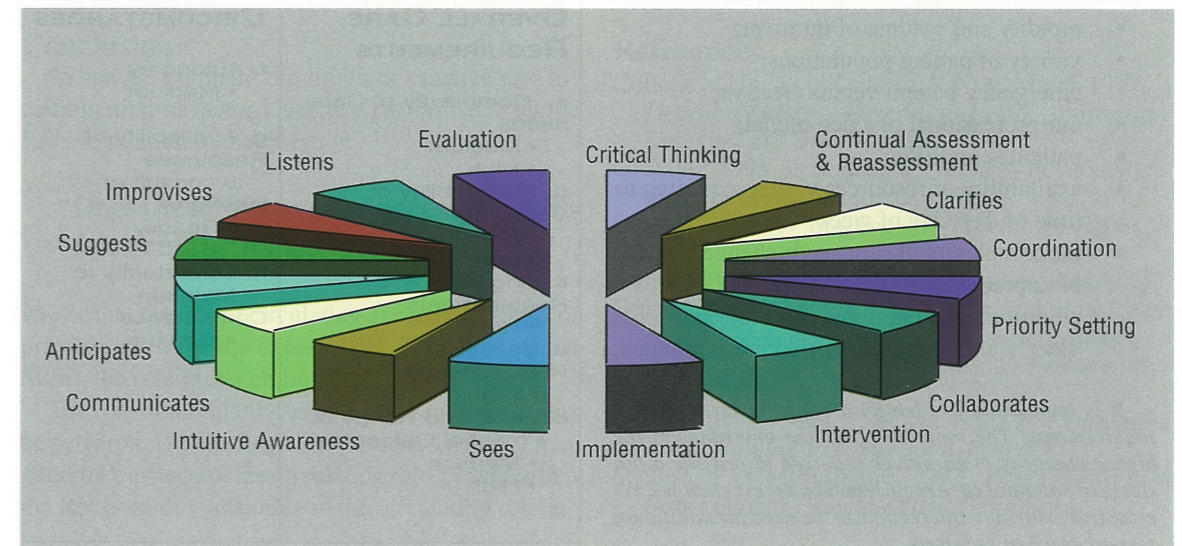
Readily- available to consult/intervene prn.

h. Opportunity to maintain competence:

Is related to the group of clients with which you are familiar. Thus the opportunity to maintain competence may vary from low to high. Opportunity for the RPN to maintain competence is affected by Complexity of care needs, time of day, day of the week, availability of resources.

These factors limit the RPN's opportunity. Conversely, the RN functions in this role frequently. Therefore the RN's opportunity to maintain competence is high.

Medium - performs occasionally



Steps in the Process

STEP 1 WHAT ARE THE OVERALL CARE REQUIREMENTS ?								OVERALL CARE REQUIREMENTS
A	B	+	C	D	+	E	=	
COMPLEXITY OF CLIENT'S CARE NEEDS	PREDICTABILITY OF CLIENT'S CONDITION		COGNITIVE REQUIREMENTS	TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS		LEVEL AND RANGE OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES		
Low	High		Low	Low		Low		
Medium	Medium		Medium	Medium		Medium		
High	Low		High	High		High		

STEP 2 WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES ?						CIRCUMSTANCES
F	+	G	+	H	=	
LEVEL OF AUTONOMY REQUIRED		AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO CONSULT OR INTERVENE		COGNITIVE REQUIREMENTS		
Low		Immediately		High		
Medium		Readily		Medium		
High		Not Readily		Low		

STOP !

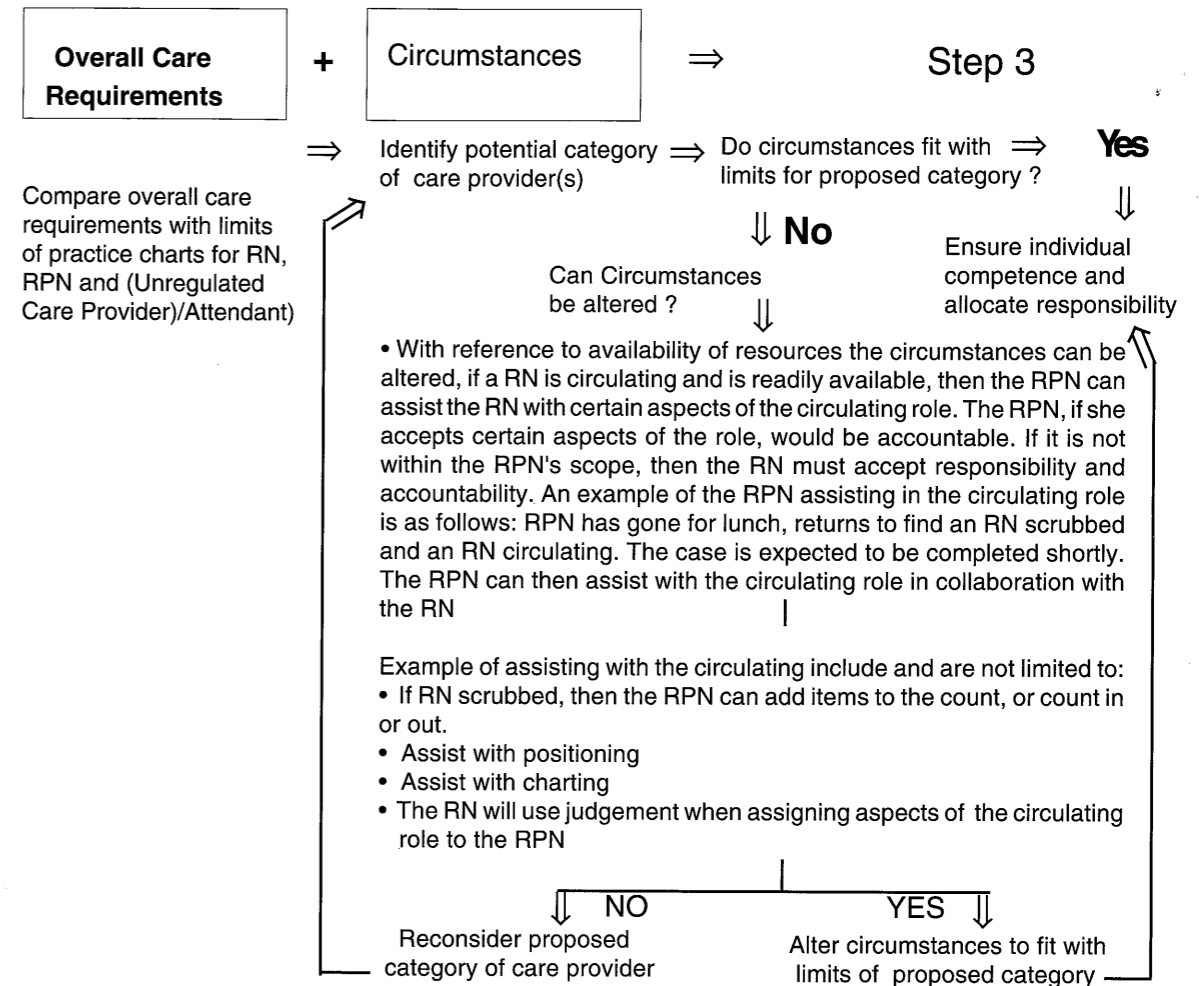
Consider the overall environmental factors:

- continuity of care;
- rapidity and volume of turnover;
- variety of patient populations;
- emergency patient versus elective;
- our professional practice model;
- patients condition;
- availability of resources varies according to time of day, day of week; and,
- the complexity of care needs change because of unpredictable events within the care environments that impacts on the care provider's ability to provide the care as planned.

It is impossible to identify a constant level of care requirements. The more complex the environment the higher category of caregiver required to provide a full range of potential care requirements, assess changes, re-establish priorities and recognize the need for additional resources when required.

SUMMARY	
OVERALL CARE REQUIREMENTS	CIRCUMSTANCES
a. Complexity of Care needs • Medium • High b. Predictability of Condition • High • Low c. Cognitive Requirements • High d. Technical Requirements • High e. Level and Range of Potential Outcomes • Medium • High	f. Autonomy • Medium g. Availability of Resources to consult or intervene • Readily h. Opportunity to Maintain Competence • Medium

Step 3 - What is the appropriate category of care provider ?



Conclusions

When we compare the limits of practice and the combination of factor levels for performance by the RPN in relation to the question:

“Does the RPN have the necessary skills to circulate in the Operating Room?”

we see that the role of circulating exceeds the limits of practice, even for the expert RPN. The RPN cannot fulfill the role in it's entirety.

The role of circulating in an Operating Room must be performed by the Registered Nurse. The RPN may undertake aspects of the circulating role, provided that the RN is readily available in the circulating role. ■

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