Nurse entrepreneurs or "independent", "private" or "self-employed" nurses offer a wide range of services. They may provide services themselves or employ others to do so. Their practice can be directed towards individual clients or groups such as families, communities, and/or organizations. The types of independent nursing services offered is also expansive, ranging from direct care services such as foot care or private duty nursing, through to roles in advocacy, health promotion, education, research, administration, and consultation. Before you go out on your own, however, it is essential that you carefully explore the following professional and business considerations.

Professional Considerations

- It is mandatory that the nursing service you wish to provide be within the scope of practice of RNs in this province. If the service you plan to offer is not traditionally considered to be nursing, you must call ARNNL for advice. Just because the entrepreneur is a nurse, it does not necessarily follow that the service provided will be recognized as nursing practice or deemed an appropriate role for RNs.

- You must have the necessary credentials and expertise to safely and competently provide the service. In general, the more specialized the service or greater the client risks, the higher the qualifications required. ARNNL requires a copy of your educational qualifications and information on your relevant work experiences. We will then advise you accordingly.

- To maintain competence, you must also participate in appropriate continuing education and critically evaluate the nursing and other research relevant to your practice.

- All RNs are expected to practice in accordance with established provincial legislation and ARNNL standards. If you are planning to offer a specialized nursing service such as diabetes management, then you are also expected to practice according to all relevant guidelines developed for that specialty area. NPs interested in private practice are encouraged to seek advice from the ARNNL Nursing Consultant for Advanced Practice to ensure that their proposed services are in keeping with NP Regulations.

- As a practicing RN you are legally and professionally accountable for the quality of your practice. You will be held responsible by your clients and ARNNL. In certain situations you may also be accountable to a third party such as a health care agency that has contracted you to provide nursing services, or an insurance company if your clients are seeking reimbursement. To provide assurance to the public of the quality of your service, it is recommended that you prepare/adopt written policies and procedures to guide your practice.

- You must have the necessary professional liability protection and business insurance. The Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) offers professional liability protection for nurses in independent practice as long as you are a practicing member in good standing with ARNNL. Through CNPS you are eligible for up to $1 million dollars per
Independent Nursing Practice... Continued

Maxine Hoskins, Owner/Operator, MAXimum Home Support Services, Inc., received the 2005 Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs (NLOWE) Entrepreneur of the Year Award for the Western Region. Maxine, a nurse for over 20 years, began MAXimum Home Care Services in 1992. By putting her clients first, Maxine has ensured the success of her company. Congratulations!

Photo courtesy NLOWE

Independent Nursing Practice

Independent nursing practice is a business. Therefore it is critical that you develop a viable business plan. Scott Andrews with the St. John’s YMCA-YWCA Enterprise Centre stresses, "there is a world of difference between a business idea and a feasible opportunity". Is there a market for your service? Along with the Y Enterprise (www.ymymcea.nf.net) there are a number of other resources available to assist you to develop a sound business plan including: Canada Newfoundland and Labrador Business Service Centre (www.cbsc.org/), NLOWE - Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs, and the Business Planning Guide from the Community Business Development Corporations of NL (www.cbdc.nf.ca).

You also need to determine how to generate and manage your income. A market analysis can help you determine the monetary value of your service. ARNNL does not identify a fee structure. Presently, nurses are not eligible to access monies for service through the provincial Medical Care Plan (MCP) and must therefore charge their clients a fee. Clients with a private insurance plan may then be eligible for reimbursement. We recommend that you discuss your business proposal with local insurance brokers such as Blue Cross, and consult with an accountant to establish a system to manage your client accounts.

As a professional there are some ethical restrictions about how you market your service and recruit clients that must be carefully considered. Standard marketing strategies, including business cards, brochures, and advertisements in the media, may be used as long as the service is represented clearly and fairly. Be sure to review the ARNNL guidelines Advertising Nursing Services (1994). In particular, be aware of any conflicts of interest and the restrictions regarding the use of the Registered Nurse title and endorsement of products.

Putting it all Together

Prior to offering services you need to submit to ARNNL an outline of your independent nursing practice, identifying:

a) the services you wish to provide,
b) how you plan to recruit clients, i.e., a marketing plan,
c) the specific standards, guidelines, and policies which will direct your practice,
d) as necessary, information on your processes for physician consultation, obtaining authorized medical directives for services which require physician validation, and making necessary referrals, and

e) your qualifications in an updated resume with copies of relevant documents which verify your educational preparation.

In addition, ARNNL will seek validation that you are adhering to the nursing Code of Ethics (CNA, 2002) by addressing fairness, choice, and privacy and confidentiality issues in the processes you establish for obtaining informed consent and documenting care.

Independent nursing practice can be a very exciting and rewarding adventure for the experienced nurse with specialized skills. Planning is, however, critical to success. If you require more information give us a call or contact our office for a copy of the Independent Nursing Practice Resource Kit. Good Luck in your endeavors.

References