All Registered Nurses are professionally and legally accountable to practice within their scope. Consequently, it is essential that each RN know what competencies are approved to be within the scope of nursing practice within the province, within your employing agency, and finally, within your own nurse-client relationships.

The scope of nursing practice is defined as the range of roles, functions, responsibilities, and activities for which RNs are educated and authorized to perform (ARNNL, 1995).

To determine what competencies are authorized to be within the scope of nursing practice in the province, you can check out the following sources.

1. School of Nursing Curriculum - What were you taught and what is being taught in today’s BN Collaborative nursing program? An outline of these competencies can be found in the ARNNL document, Competencies Required By Registered Nurses for Entry to Nursing Practice 2000-2001 (1998).

2. ARNNL Advanced Nursing and Medical Nursing Shared Skills document (1993; revised Appendix 2004) - This document identifies select psychomotor competencies that may have been introduced in a basic educational program but which require additional education and experience before RNs can perform them in practice.

3. Continuing Education Programs - Look at the content of both formal and informal sources such as, certification programs, peer reviewed journal articles, and conference proceedings.

4. Relevant Legislation - Although there are not many nursing competencies restricted by legislation in our province, there are some limitations in Bills that govern public services; for example, signing birth and death certificates, and those that govern professional practice, such as, pharmacy regulations.

To determine what competencies are within the scope of nursing practice within your agency, you must be familiar with all relevant nursing policies. Further, by participating in agency-based continuing education sessions and inservices, you have an opportunity to seek clarification on the scope of nursing practice for new and emerging roles.

Finally, to determine what client-specific competencies you should perform, you need to reflect upon your own knowledge and experience, and evaluate your ability to perform the specific competency in the particular client care situation.

Because you are asked to do a particular function, or you did something similar in another role, may not validate that the competency is within the scope of nursing practice. Ask yourself:

- Am I educated? Did I gain the required theoretical knowledge and practical experience to safely and competently perform this role?
- Am I authorized? Is the performance of the function supported in nursing documents, policy, and/or procedural guidelines?
- Am I competent? Do I have the necessary skill and required supports to safely perform this function for this client?

An article I read several years ago when I worked on an acute care nursing unit helped ‘hit home’ to me the importance of continually doing these checks (Green, Crismon, Waddill, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). The authors described a study they conducted in the State of Texas that examined the profile of the typical nurse who was disciplined by the regulatory association (N=476). Contrary to what they anticipated, the case example was not the new graduate overwhelmed by responsibilities and pressures of the profession. In fact, they found that the vast majority of the nurses who had been disciplined worked full time and had been in the profession for greater than 11 years. Upon further exploration, they discovered that most of these nurses were often new to their position or practice setting. Many nurses participating in the study said “… that their downfall was assuming that a policy or procedure was the same as it had been in their previous work setting. Only after an incident did they learn that there were different expectations… or different equipment, or documentation required… (p. 39).” Other comments reflected that there was often a “lapse in vigilance” with nurses indicating that they performed competencies without adequate knowledge or preparation.

Do not let ignorance or assumptions affect your career. Know what competencies are within your scope of practice. Obtain the necessary authorization, education, and practical experience to safely perform all of the competencies required for your area of practice. Use the resources that are available.

Reference