

What nurses do

First we will describe what all nurses do, and then we will move on to consider some of the things that differentiate one nursing field from another

Challenges in the future

The core function of the nurse will always be caring. Many of the things that nurses do now they will do in the future, although the ways in which they work will change to meet advances in nursing and healthcare.

All nurses will need to be fully equipped to respond to these challenges and work safely and effectively in an ever changing service. All nurses will need basic knowledge and skills to deliver essential care to everyone.

They will also need more specific knowledge and skills to meet the needs of people in their chosen field of nursing, that is: adult, mental health, learning disabilities or children's nursing.

When asked what all nurses do, many people would say they care for people. Although this is a key part of their role, nurses are members of a profession that requires them to work within a code of practice.

This means they are accountable for what they do, even if they delegate tasks to others. Nurses work in partnership with others to ensure that people, their families and carers receive the highest possible quality service.

They provide care wherever people live, work, play or are educated; in fact, all the places where people receive care. They can provide this over the phone and through the internet.

As a result of this, nurses must learn in hospital, in residential settings and in the wider community where all levels of care will be increasingly provided.

Delivering care

All nurses must be able to assess people's needs and help people meet them when they cannot do so for themselves. This means that nurses must be able to deliver care that meets the essential needs of people and enables them to feel safe and cared for.

This includes: responding to their fear and distress in a helpful and therapeutic way; caring for their essential needs with dignity and respect; ensuring that they have enough to eat and drink; are clean and comfortable and able to go to the toilet when they need to.

Caring is not just about providing support or interventions in times of illness or distress. It is about keeping people and the wider population healthy. It is also about helping people to recover and reach their full potential, especially when adjusting to an illness or disability.

Developing skills

Nurses use highly developed skills to support people towards the end of their life and to make the process of dying as comfortable as possible. Nursing is as much about the art of caring as it is about science and technology. Caring with compassion and dignity will always be central to what nurses do.

Nurses do not always provide care themselves; they also supervise and delegate responsibility to others while still being accountable for that care. They also manage and lead teams of nurses and of other professionals too, to ensure that care is joined up. They also teach others, including nursing students, and assess their competence.

When they qualify, all nurses must have the knowledge and breadth of skills to provide basic care to anyone who needs it. This will include an understanding of a broad range of different subject areas, including the relevant sciences.

Once qualified

Knowledge is constantly advancing and people will expect all nurses to keep up with scientific developments, such as new therapeutic approaches or advances in genetics and pharmacology.

Some nurses will go on to prescribe medicines. They will get the foundation knowledge for this in their pre-registration programme and will further extend their knowledge and skills after registration.

As well as having the knowledge, skills and attitudes described above, nurses will also need specific skills related to their chosen field of practice. The following provide some examples of what nurses in each field do.

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