

# Continuing Nursing Education: Why?

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Continuing education (CE) is required for nursing re-licensure in Ohio and a number of other states. Continuing education is also required for initial and/or ongoing certification in specific areas of nursing practice. Regardless of the requirements, many nurses consider continuing education as a professional responsibility. This is supported by the ANA Code of Ethics for nurses, which states in provision 5 that the nurse “owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to ...maintain competence and continue personal and professional growth” (ANA, 2015, p. 19). Nurses are expected to engage in self-assessment and implement a professional growth plan that supports developing knowledge, skills, and competence. Building on this expectation from the code of ethics, the scope and standards of practice for nursing (ANA, 2021) includes a specific competency related to education, stating that “the registered nurse seeks knowledge and competence that reflects current nursing practice and promotes futuristic thinking” (p. 98). Expectations identified within this competency include self-as-

essment, participation in nursing and interprofessional learning activities to improve individual and/or team performance, and maintaining knowledge and skills relevant to current practice and evolving health care situations locally and globally.

In its update on the future of nursing, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (2021) offered several recommendations for improving nursing’s contributions to healthcare in the context of a rapidly changing healthcare environment and complex needs of individuals, families, and communities. Particularly relevant to continuing nursing education are recommendations related to increasing knowledge of and using innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence to address social determinants of health and implementing evidence-based interventions to improve nurses’ health and wellbeing. Continuing education is vital to learning about these and other emerging issues in healthcare.

As rapidly as healthcare is changing, nurses must engage in continuing education to keep current and safe in their

practice. The Association for Nursing Professional Development defines ongoing professional learning as “the continual acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and abilities throughout one’s career...” (Harper & Maloney, 2022, p. 123). Continuing education helps nurses keep current with evolving knowledge, maintain skills, develop new knowledge and skills, demonstrate competence, expand perspectives, transfer from one area of nursing practice to another, and prepare for new roles and opportunities. Self-reflection enables nurses to examine their own ongoing professional learning needs, explore opportunities for obtaining needed education, and engage in deliberate and purposeful learning to facilitate practice maintenance and growth. Nursing professional development practitioners have specialized knowledge and skills to help nurses with this reflection and suggest opportunities for professional growth, develop and implement education plans, and evaluate results.

Selecting quality continuing education is critical. Participating in activities offered by organizations recognized by accrediting bodies such as the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Commission on Accreditation for Nursing Continuing Professional Development ensures that content is evidence-based, relevant to identified educational needs, designed with an expected measurable outcome for learners, and free of influence by companies that make, sell, or distribute products consumed by or used on patients. Interprofessional continuing education is becoming increasingly important for nurses who practice as members of healthcare teams. Joint accreditation recognizes organizations that design continuing education activities with these same standards and

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include purposeful incorporation of goals and measurable outcomes related to team performance and outcomes.

Some nurses focus solely on the “requirement” from their state boards or credentialing organizations to obtain contact hours. The emphasis becomes accruing certificates, regardless of the topic and the nurse’s specific educational needs. Expectations in the nursing scope and standards of practice (ANA, 2021) include the responsibility of the registered nurse to mentor other nurses in their roles, support nurses new to the profession or to an organization, and facilitate a work environment that supports

ongoing education. Implementation of these expectations will help colleagues understand and appreciate the value of continuing nursing education to improve practice, performance, and outcomes, far exceeding the need to meet “requirements”.

Continuing nursing education is a shared responsibility. Individual nurses are accountable for maintaining their own knowledge and competence related to their current practice and expanding their knowledge/skill base as practice changes. Teams of nurses and interprofessional colleagues are responsible for assessing their individual and collec-

tive performance and developing new knowledge and skills to improve their practice and outcomes. Healthcare organizations must create learning environments that support ongoing professional learning. Ultimately, continuing professional development supports improving individual and team practice, achieving quality outcomes, and promoting the health of the populations we serve. ■

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the role of Director at Large for the ANA Board of Directors will allow Dr. Fisher-Grace to apply the expertise of a PhD nurse to impact patient outcomes and the nursing profession. ■

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