



COLLEGE OF NURSES
OF ONTARIO
ORDRE DES INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS DE L'ONTARIO

THE STANDARD OF CARE.

Utilization of RNs and RPNs The Three Factor Framework

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The College of Nurses of Ontario presents the Utilization of RNs and RPNs practice guideline: The Three Factor Framework.

Nursing in Ontario

Nursing is one profession with two categories.

Registered Nurse
(RN)



Registered Practical Nurse
(RPN)



In Ontario, nursing is one profession with two categories: Registered Nurse (RN) and Registered Practical Nurse (RPN). The Extended Class provides nurses with the legislated authority to autonomously perform controlled acts not available to RNs and RPNs. We will not be referring to RN(EC)s in this module. For more information on the Extended Class, go to the College's website at www.cno.org.

This chapter will outline the three factor framework, which can guide you in making decisions about the appropriate category of nurse required to meet client needs.

Three factor framework



Both nurses and employers make client assignment decisions based on the characteristics of the nurse, client population and environment. The three factor framework takes into account the nurse's knowledge, skill and judgment; the client's health condition, care needs and situation; as well as the environment in which the care is being provided, including the specific supports it provides.

Let's look first at the nurse.

The nurse's knowledge, skill and judgment



When considering a nurse's knowledge, skill and judgment, take into account both the technical and cognitive aspects of nursing. While RPNs and RNs may be capable of performing a client care intervention, the technical performance alone is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by a specific level of cognitive ability in areas such as critical thinking, decision-making and professional judgment.

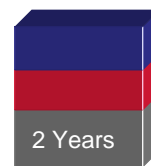
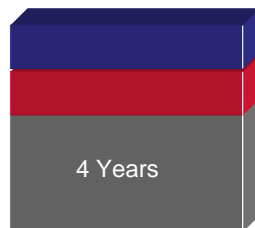
Nurse factors

Differences in education



RN

RPN



Cognitive ability is gained through foundational knowledge, ongoing learning and knowledge application. The foundational knowledge of RNs and RPNs is different. RNs graduate with a four-year bachelor's degree in nursing; RPNs with a two-year diploma in practical nursing. Although some of the academic courses for RNs and RPNs may have similar titles, they differ in the depth and breadth of knowledge that is covered. As a result, the level of autonomous practice that RNs and RPNs are capable of is different.

Nurse factors

Differences in autonomous practice

Autonomous practice is the ability to make decisions and independently carry out nursing responsibilities.

Knowledge and knowledge application affects the level of consultation and collaboration required to meet client care needs.

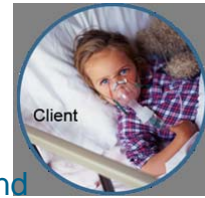


Autonomous practice is the ability to make decisions and independently carry out nursing responsibilities. It's directly related to the nurse's foundational knowledge. RNs meet the nursing needs of clients regardless of the complexity of their conditions and in all practice environments. RPNs have greater autonomy when caring for clients with less complex conditions. RPNs require consultation and collaboration to meet more complex client care needs. The nurse is only one part of the three factor framework. Let's look now at the client.

Client factors

Client care requirements are influenced by the:

- complexity of care needs;
- predictability of outcomes of client care; and
- risk of negative outcomes in response to care.



Client care requirements are influenced by the complexity of care needs, the predictability of outcomes of client care and the risk of negative outcomes in response to care. All three elements must be considered when determining the appropriate category of nurse required to provide care.

Client factors: Complexity of care needs



Less complex

Moderately complex

Highly complex



To determine the level of complexity, ask:

- Are the care needs well defined?
- Are there multiple issues?
- Does the client require frequent monitoring or reassessment?
- Is there a risk of negative outcomes?
- Are there support systems in place?

Client care needs can range from less complex to highly complex.

To determine the level of complexity of care needs, ask yourself the following questions: Are the care needs well defined; are there multiple issues and are they overlapping; does the client require frequent monitoring or reassessment because their condition is fluctuating; is the client is at risk of negative outcomes; and are there support systems in place, such as a social worker or family involvement.

A client requiring less complex care has well-defined care needs, coping mechanisms and supports in place, and their condition is well controlled with little fluctuation. A moderately complex client has identifiable or established care needs, but coping mechanisms may not be in place. A highly complex client has care needs that are not well defined, unknown coping mechanisms and supports and their condition is not well controlled and requires frequent monitoring.

Client factors: Level of predictability



Predictable

Moderately predictable

Unpredictable



To determine the level of predictability, consider the:


- possible changes in health condition;
- timing; and
- nature of the outcomes.

To determine the level of predictability consider the possible changes in the health condition, as well as the timing and nature of the outcomes. Care requirements are considered predictable when outcomes and changes are predictable. For example, a client who has had paraplegia for many years and whose health condition is stable has well-established care needs, and the outcomes are predictable.


Care requirements are moderately predictable when the client's health condition may not be controlled or managed as well; identifiable changes could occur and the timing may be unpredictable. For example, a client with asthma can have symptoms that worsen on exposure to allergens.

Care requirements are unpredictable when the outcomes and change in health condition are unpredictable. For example, a client with acute heart failure and uncontrolled diabetes has highly complex care needs because the change in health condition, both in timing and the nature of the outcomes, is difficult to predict.

Client factors: Risk of negative outcomes



Low risk Moderate risk High risk





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Another client factor addresses the risk of negative outcomes in response to the care provided. There is a low risk of negative outcomes when the signs and symptoms are obvious and the responses to care are predictable, localized and manageable. An example of a low-risk situation is administering blood products to a client who has chronic anemia and regularly receives an infusion of red blood cells with no history of adverse reactions. The risk of negative outcomes is fairly low due to the client's previous history of responses to this treatment.

There is a moderate risk when a number of identifiable negative outcomes are possible, and these could have a systemic effect, creating an urgent or emergency situation. An example of a moderate-risk situation is administering blood products to a client known to have reactions during infusion.

There is a high risk of negative outcomes when the responses are unpredictable, systemic or wide-ranging, and the signs and symptoms are subtle and difficult to detect. The effect may be immediate, systemic and/or create an urgent situation. An example of a high-risk situation is a client who is admitted with an acute gastrointestinal bleed who has never received a blood transfusion.

Test your knowledge



Test your knowledge of determining the complexity of client care needs. Click on the correct answers in the following quizzes.

Scenario 1

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is responding well to treatment. Louis's blood glucose levels have never fluctuated during treatment, and he has a daughter who is involved with his care.

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is responding well to treatment. Louis's blood glucose levels have never fluctuated during treatment, and he has a daughter who is involved with his care.

Are the overall client care requirements considered:

- a) Less complex
- b) Moderately complex
- c) Highly complex

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Scenario 2

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is responding well to treatment. His blood glucose levels are in the normal range but require frequent monitoring. Louis has a history of heart failure which is managed by medication and lifestyle modifications. His daughter, who was involved with his care, has moved away.

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is responding well to treatment. Louis's blood glucose levels have never fluctuated during treatment, and he has a daughter who is involved with his care.

Are the overall client care requirements considered:

- a) Less complex
- b) Moderately complex
- c) Highly complex

You must answer the question before continuing

The correct answer is:

Submit

Your answer:

Clear

Scenario 3

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is not responding well to treatment. His blood glucose levels are not well managed and require frequent monitoring and changes in insulin dosage. He has a history of heart failure, and the nurse has noted a decrease in urinary output in the past eight hours. His daughter, who was involved with his care, has moved away.

An elderly client, Louis, who has had diabetes for several years, is being treated for an infected foot ulcer that is not responding well to treatment. His blood glucose levels are not well managed and require frequent monitoring and changes in insulin dosage. He has a history of heart failure, and the nurse has noted a decrease in urinary output in the past eight hours. His daughter, who was involved with his care, has moved away.

Are the overall client care requirements considered:

- a) Less complex
- b) Moderately complex
- c) Highly complex

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

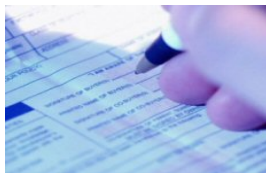
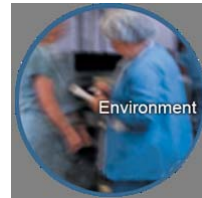
Three factor framework



The last part of the three factor framework is environment. Environmental factors influence the category of nurse required.
Let's examine the third factor: the environment.

Environmental factors

- practice supports;
- consultative resources; and
- the stability and predictability of the environment.



Environmental factors include practice supports, consultative resources, and the stability and predictability of the environment.

Environmental factors: Practice supports

Many practice supports Some practice supports Few practice supports



The environment in which the care is provided can have many, some or few practice supports. An environment with many practice supports has clear, identified policies, assessment tools and pre-developed care plans. There are a high proportion of expert nurses and nurses familiar with the environment.

An environment with some practice supports has policies, parameters and pre-developed care plans, but is limited in the number of expert nurses familiar with the practice setting. In this type of environment, some independent decision-making is required.

An environment with few practice supports has unclear or no policies, parameters and/or pre-developed plans of care. There is a frequent turnover of staff and a low proportion of expert nurses and nurses familiar with the environment.

Environmental factors: Consultative resources

Many consultative resources

Few consultative resources



Consultation:

- Involves obtaining information, advice or assistance from a more experienced or knowledgeable nurse or health care provider.

Another environmental factor is the availability and accessibility of consultative resources, such as information, advice or assistance from a more knowledgeable nurse or health care provider. RNs and RPNs consult with other health care professionals when a situation demands expertise beyond their competence. Depending on the complexity of the client's care needs, consultation may result in receiving advice or transferring care. An environment may have many or few consultative resources.

Environmental factors: Stability and predictability

Stable and predictable Moderately stable and predictable



Unstable and unpredictable

Environments range from stable and predictable, to unstable and unpredictable. A stable, predictable environment has a low rate of client turnover and few unpredictable events.

A moderately stable and predictable environment has some turnover of clients and considerable variation in the overall client care needs.

An unstable environment has a high rate of client turnover with many unpredictable events. It's difficult to identify an overall consistent level of client care requirements.

Test your knowledge



Test your knowledge on the environmental factors. Click on the correct answers in the following quizzes.

Scenario 4

The practice setting has an RN immediately available to consult with or transfer care; clear policies and client plans of care; and a standardized assessment tool that can be individualized to the client.

The practice setting has an RN immediately available to consult with or transfer care; clear policies and client plans of care; and a standardized assessment tool that can be individualized to the client.

This environment is considered:

- a) Low complexity
- b) Moderate complexity
- c) High complexity

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Scenario 5

The practice setting has an RN on-call to consult with and who will work the shift if transfer of care is needed; a clear plan of care; few policies and no standardized assessment tools.

The practice setting has an RN on-call to consult with and who will work the shift if transfer of care is needed; a clear plan of care; few policies and no standardized assessment tools.

This environment is considered

- a) Low complexity
- b) Moderate complexity
- c) High complexity

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Scenario 6

The practice setting has no RN or other health care professional available to consult with or to transfer care to, if needed; no established plan of care; and there are no standardized assessment tools.

The practice setting has no RN or other health care professional available to consult with or to transfer care to, if needed; no established plan of care; and there are no standardized assessment tools.

This environment is considered:

- a) Low complexity
- b) Moderate complexity
- c) High complexity

You must answer the question before
continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Varying levels of complexity

RPNs and RNs
independently
care for clients

RPNs and RNs
collaborate at varying
levels

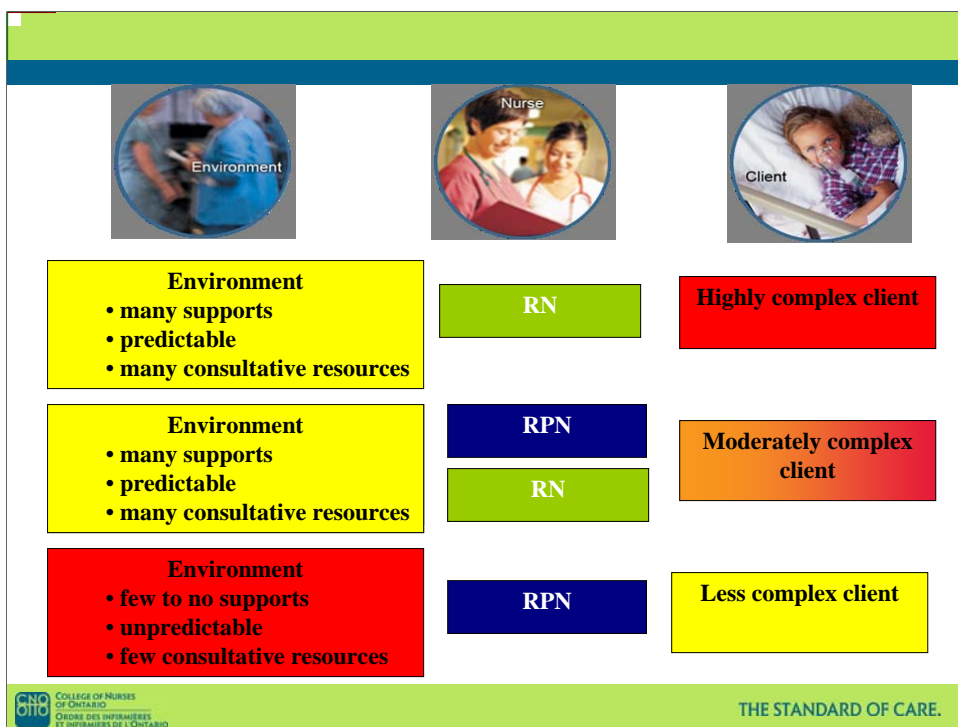
RNs provide care
independently and
RPNs are involved in
limited aspects



All three factors, the nurse, the client and the environment, must be considered when determining the appropriate category of nurse required to meet the client's care needs. One factor alone does not provide enough information to determine the category of nurse required.

RPNs and RNs can independently care for a client requiring less complex care, in a stable and predictable environment that has many practice supports and consultative resources. RPNs and RNs collaborate at varying degrees in the care of clients whose care needs are moderately stable and predictable in an environment that have some practice supports and consultative resources.

RNs independently provide care when client care needs are highly complex, in unstable and unpredictable environments with few practice supports. When one of the factors changes, re-assess the category of nurse assigned to the client.



f the availability of practice supports, predictability of the environment and availability of consultative resources changes, it directly affects the RPN's ability to provide care for moderately complex clients. When the environment is rich in practice supports and consultative resources, RPNs are prepared to provide care for a client whose needs are moderately complex. However, if consultation becomes excessive, then the care should be transferred to the RN.

In situations where the client's care needs are less complex, the RPN practises autonomously, even in the absence of environmental supports and consultative resources.

For clients with highly complex care needs, the RN is the most appropriate category of nurse, even if there are many practice supports.

Test your knowledge



Test your knowledge of assigning the appropriate category of nurse. Click on the correct answers in the following quizzes.

Scenario 1

Maude, a 72-year-old client with a history of heart failure, is admitted to the medical unit during the night shift for an infected wound. Maude has a saline lock and is receiving intravenous antibiotics. Maude's daughter will remain with her for the rest of the night. There are standardized assessment tools and an established care plan in place. There are three senior RNs and two RPNs familiar with the practice setting working the shift. The RNs and RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.

Maude, a 72-year-old client with a history of heart failure, is admitted to the medical unit during the night shift for an infected wound. Maude has a saline lock and is receiving intravenous antibiotics. Maude's daughter will remain with her for the rest of the night. There are standardized assessment tools and an established care plan in place. There are three senior RNs and two RPNs familiar with the practice setting working this night shift. **The RNs and RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.**

What category of nurse could be assigned to the client?

- a) RPN
- b) RN
- c) RPN, in consultation with an RN

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Discussion

The correct answer is A. The client care needs could be assigned to the RPN. The care needs are well defined and predictable, there are family supports, and the environment has many supports and consultative resources. The RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.

The correct answer is A. The client care needs could be assigned to the RPN. The care needs are well defined and predictable, there are family supports, and the environment has many supports and consultative resources. **The RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.**

Scenario 2

Maude, a 72-year-old client with a history of heart failure, is admitted to the medical unit during the night shift for an infected wound. Maude has a saline lock and is receiving intravenous antibiotics. The night nurse notes a decrease in urinary output. There are standardized assessment tools, and the care plan has been updated to monitor signs of heart failure. There are two RNs and two RPNs on the shift. The RNs and RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.

Maude, a 72-year-old client with a history of heart failure, is admitted to the medical unit during the night shift for an infected wound. Maude has a saline lock and is receiving intravenous antibiotics. The night nurse notes a decrease in urinary output. There are standardized assessment tools, and the care plan has been updated to monitor signs of heart failure. There are two RNs and two RPNs on the shift. **The RNs and RPNs working the shift have the education and experience to administer intravenous medications.**

What category of nurse could be assigned to the client?

- a) RN
- b) RPN
- c) RPN in consultation with the RN

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Discussion

The correct answer is C. Maude could be assigned to an RPN in consultation with an RN. Her care needs are moderately predictable, and any changes in health condition are fairly obvious through the frequent monitoring of her blood glucose levels, fluid balance and evidence of shortness of breath.

The environment has many practice supports, such as the pre-developed care plan and assessment tool; however, only a moderate amount of consultative resources are available.

The RPN would not be practising autonomously and would be expected to consult with the RN when making decisions about a change in the plan of care or when a change in health status is identified. The RN would need to accept the transfer of care if the client's condition becomes highly complex.

The correct answer is C. Maude could be assigned to an RPN in consultation with an RN. Her care needs are moderately predictable, and any changes in health condition are fairly obvious through the frequent monitoring of her blood glucose levels, fluid balance and evidence of shortness of breath. The environment has many practice supports, such as the pre-developed care plan and assessment tool; however, only a moderate amount of consultative resources are available. The RPN would not be practising autonomously and would be expected to consult with the RN when making decisions about a change in the plan of care or when a change in health status is identified. The RN would need to accept the transfer of care if the client's condition becomes highly complex.

Scenario 3

It's the night shift on a long weekend. One RN has called in sick, leaving one RN and two RPNs on shift. Maude, a 72-year-old client with no known history of heart failure, was transferred from the emergency department earlier in the day.

Maude has diabetes and is being treated for an infected wound. She has an IV of normal saline running at 125 cc/hr and is receiving IV antibiotics. Maude is complaining of shortness of breath and has pain around her wound. Her blood glucose levels are elevated. The doctor has been paged, but there has been no response yet.

It's the night shift on a long weekend. One RN has called in sick, leaving one RN and two RPNs on shift. Maude, a 72-year-old client with no known history of heart failure, was transferred from the emergency department earlier in the day. Maude has diabetes and is being treated for an infected wound. She has an IV of normal saline running at 125 cc/hr and is receiving IV antibiotics. Maude is complaining of shortness of breath and has pain around her wound. Her blood glucose levels are elevated. The doctor has been paged, but there has been no response yet.

What category of nurse could be assigned to the client?

- a) RN
- b) RPN
- c) RPN in consultation with an RN

You must answer the question before continuing

Your answer:

Submit

The correct answer is:

Clear

Discussion

The correct answer is A, the RN would be assigned to this client. The client care needs are moderate to highly complex because there are multiple and overlapping health conditions.

Maude's condition and response to the care is unpredictable, and her health outcomes are unknown. In addition, the environment has limited consultative resources.

The RPN could assist with providing aspects of care such as obtaining vital signs, urinary output, blood glucose levels and report the findings to the RN.

The correct answer is A, the RN would be assigned to this client. The client care needs are moderate to highly complex because there are multiple and overlapping health conditions. Maude's condition and response to the care is unpredictable, and her health outcomes are unknown. In addition, the environment has limited consultative resources. The RPN could assist with providing aspects of care such as obtaining vital signs, urinary output, blood glucose levels and report the findings to the RN.

The Three Factor Framework

Your Score	{score}
Max Score	{max-score}
Number of Quiz Attempts	{total-attempts}

Question Feedback/Review Information Will Appear Here

Continue

Review Quiz

Utilization of RNs and RPNs learning module

1. An Overview
2. The Three-Factor Framework



You have now completed Chapter 2. To work through another chapter in this module, close this presentation and return to the Learning Centre.

To ask a College Practice Consultant a question, click on the “Contact” button in the top right-hand corner of your screen.

Click on the link to read the College’s Utilization of RNs and RPNs practice guideline.