INPLASY

A global overview of regulation and credentialing of advanced practice nurses: A scoping review

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INTRODUCTION

*R*eview question / Objective What are the global perspectives on the regulation and credentialing of advanced practice nursing roles?

Background Advanced practice nursing is a field of nursing that expands the scope of practice of the profession. Through an expert knowledge base and additional education, advanced practice nurses (APNs) engage in a wide range of interventions to improve the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. While APNs possess a higher degree of expertise and autonomy compared to registered nurses/ generalist nurses, their practice remains grounded in nursing values and principles, ensuring continuity with the profession's overarching goals of promoting health, preventing illness, and providing compassionate care to individuals, families, and communities. This foundation underscores the importance of maintaining a patient-centered approach, holistic care, and adherence to ethical standards inherent in the nursing profession through regulation and credentials. The literature suggests approximately 40 countries have well-established APN roles, highlighting the global recognition of the importance of these roles in healthcare delivery. The number of APNs varies significantly between countries, reflecting differences in healthcare systems, regulations, and the overall integration of these professionals into the healthcare workforce. This diversity in APN integration across countries provides a rich landscape for studying promising practices and identifying areas for improvement to enhance the contribution of APNs to healthcare worldwide.

Global efforts to create a common understanding of the APN role are underway. For instance, in 2020, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) published a guideline on APNs to provide a common framework for policymakers, governments, healthcare professionals, and educators to understand the APN role. By establishing clear definitions and common terminology, the guideline promotes consistency and coherence in understanding the implementation and integration of APN roles across different healthcare settings and geographic regions. This shared understanding is crucial for advancing the professional recognition and integration of APNs into healthcare systems globally.

Rationale The advancement of APN roles around the globe is rapidly evolving and with increased attention to inter-jurisdictional mobility, there is a need to better understand the state of regulation and credentialing of APNs globally in order to identify challenges and opportunities. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of global perspectives on the regulation and credentialing of APNs. Specifically, we will explore how APN roles are regulated in different countries, the requirements for obtaining credentials, the requirements for demonstrating continuing competence, and the overall climate surrounding APN practice in terms of acceptance, support, recognition, and regulation competency within healthcare systems. By understanding the current state of regulation and credentialing of APNs worldwide, policymakers, healthcare organizations, and APN advocates can work towards improving regulatory frameworks, standardizing credentialing processes, and fostering environments conducive to the growth and effectiveness of APN roles worldwide.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis In collaboration with a medical librarian, we undertook a pilot search using Ovid MEDLINE and reviewed the first 100 results to refine our research strategy. The search terms included: Advanced Practice Nursing or (advanced practice nurs* or advanced practice registered nurs*) OR (nurs* specialist* or nurs* practitioner* or nurs* anesthetist* or nurs* midwife* or nurs* midwives or nurs* clinician* or nurs* prescriber*) AND (regulation* adj5 (profession* or nurs*) OR (governance or oversight or statute* or ordinance or credential* or accreditation* or certification* or licens*) OR Credentialing OR Accreditation OR Certification OR Licensure, Nursing OR Government Regulation. Following the

pilot search, comprehensive searches were subsequently executed in Ovid MEDLINE, Ovid Embase, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Cochrane Library (via Wiley) on April 8, 2024. To capture all relevant literature about the regulation of APNs, relevant keywords and controlled vocabulary were carefully selected. Searches were limited to the English language. The second phase of this review will involve a search of grey literature through Google Scholar, followed by a third phase, which will entail a manual search of the reference lists within the identified studies and relevant reviews.

Eligibility criteria The population of interest for this review are APNs, which includes registered nurses/generalist nurses who have acquired an extensive knowledge base, sophisticated decision-making abilities, and clinical competencies for expanded practice through additional training, with specific characteristics influenced by the context and/or country in which they are credentialed to practice. A variety of titles are used to characterize APNs such as nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, advanced practice registered nurse, and nurse anesthetist. Since these terms may vary across countries, we will return to the definition to inform our inclusion and exclusion of articles. Given our focus on the global context, articles that discuss the APN role in any country will be included. We will include articles that discuss regulatory practices governing the scope of practice for APNs and credentialing processes such as educational qualifications, clinical experience, specialized training, and certification exams. We will include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. Quantitative studies may provide statistical data and empirical evidence regarding regulation and credentialing, such as the number of APNs seeking credentials, the types of credentials obtained, and the factors influencing successful credentialing or regulation outcomes. Qualitative studies may offer in-depth insights into the experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered during the process of credentialing and regulation. Theses, books, unavailable articles, and non-English articles will be excluded.

Source of evidence screening and selection The following databases were searched: Ovid MEDLINE, Ovid Embase, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Cochrane Library (via Wiley). Results from the database search were imported into Covidence systematic review software (www.covidence.org) and screening of titles, abstracts, and full text will be carried out using this software. Each study will be evaluated by two researchers who will independently

evaluate the abstracts, titles, and full-text articles against the eligibility criteria. Conflicts will be reviewed by a third reviewer and discussed through consensus meetings. For studies with unclear reporting or incomplete findings, we will aim to contact the original authors via email to request clarification.

Data management Each article will undergo independent data extraction by two researchers. Discrepancies will be resolved through discussion with the remaining researchers. The extracted data will be inputted into a standardized Excel sheet using Covidence software. We will extract the following from the articles: year of publication, country/countries, study design, type of APN role, and key concepts related to the regulation and credentialing of APNs.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence The results will be reported using descriptive statistics and a structured narrative synthesis. We will use descriptive statistics to illustrate frequency counts and percentages for data such as the year of publication, type of publication, and country or countries involved. We will use conventional content analysis to summarize the purpose and key concepts within the included articles and present findings through a narrative summary.

Presentation of the results We plan to create tables and figures to present our final results. The tables will organize the extracted data into a clear and concise format, allowing readers to understand and compare the findings easily. Figures will be used to visually represent key trends, patterns, or relationships identified in the data.

Language restriction Article published in English.

Country(ies) involved Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Canada, Tanzania, USA.

Keywords Advance practice nurse, Nurse Practitioner, Regulations, Credentials.

Dissemination plans We intend to prepare a manuscript for submission to respected peer-reviewed journals, such as the International Journal of Nursing Studies or the Journal for Nurse Practitioners. The manuscript will detail our methodology, findings, and implications for the regulation and credentialing of APNs globally. We aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform future research and practice of APNs. Additionally, we plan to share our findings with global organizations relevant to APNs such as the ICN to support the further development of policies, standards, and frameworks for APNs on an international scale. Our dissemination plan will allow us to engage with fellow researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange within the APN community.

Contributions of each author
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