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COMMENTARY

Beyond the Bedside: The New Nurse and Nursing Definitions: Impact and Recommendations

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Every nurse carries a personal understanding of what nursing means to her/him (Peplau, 1988). Historically, the public perceived nursing as a caring, compassionate profession primarily confined to provide standardized care to patients under the supervision of physicians (Currie & Carr-Hill, 2013). Recently, nursing has transitioned from a conventional perception to that of a contemporary clinical profession characterized by a structured career pathway, with education grounded in university degree programs rather than the traditional hospital-based diploma. Moreover, a variety of definitions, duties, and titles have arisen within the nursing profession, complicating the existence of unified definition, comparison of nursing workforces overall and the comparison of certain categories of nurses between nations (Currie & Carr-Hill, 2013).

The question of what nursing is and how to articulate it is one that the profession has found hard to answer, and it is a key subject in several scholarly articles (Jackson et al., 2021). The definition of nursing elucidates the rationale and methodology behind its formulation, as well as its fundamental principles. Additionally, the definitions of nursing, akin to the profession itself, are dynamic; nursing continually adapts to address emerging needs and incorporate new information (Royal College of Nursing, 2003). However, in light of the extensive historical and geographical disparities in nursing terminology, along with the growing diversity of nursing responsibilities and titles, professional regulatory organizations and associations, including the International Council of Nurses (ICN), have sought to provide guidance and regulation in this context (Currie & Carr-Hill, 2013).

The ICN, as the foremost global nursing organization representing over 29 million nurses, has both the authority and the obligation to delineate the profession of nursing and the role of nurses. The ICN definition of "nursing" remains the most frequently accessed page on the ICN website and has served the global nursing community well. However, in the two decades since its last revision, and the 40 years since a completely new definition was crafted, much has changed in the geopolitical landscape of health and health care (ICN, 2025). The rapid rise in health care costs, breakthroughs in technology across both health and communication sectors, and a public that is increasingly health-literate have significantly reshaped the roles and functions of nurses and nursing, and this evolution will continue.

Additionally, the new nursing definition provided by ICN was established for various goals. In the profession, these encompass applications in education, regulation, workforce planning, developing work-value instances, and promoting greater global consistency in the practice and understanding of nursing and nurses. Beyond the profession, they possess a declaratory function that unequivocally delineates the legitimate role of nursing beyond direct patient care, encompassing participation

in discussions and initiatives on health policy, climate change, humanitarian concerns, gender equity, and economics. Therefore, to address this varied brief, it has been essential to offer a more comprehensive and descriptive definition than the succinct definition requested by certain responders, which may be suitable for the general public; a new nursing definition that reflects current practices and can guide nursing into the future (ICN, 2025). This commentary reviews the ICN 2025 definition, explores how it could change the global nursing framework, and considers its role in Jordan's healthcare system to address workforce shortages and support greater professional autonomy.

The Definition of Nursing

The ICN defined nursing as "*a profession dedicated to upholding everyone's right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, through a shared commitment to providing collaborative, culturally safe, people-centered care and services. Nursing acts and advocates for people's equitable access to health and health care, and safe, sustainable environments*." (ICN, 2025). Furthermore, the ICN defined nurse as "*a professional who is educated in the scientific knowledge, skills and philosophy of nursing, and regulated to practice nursing based on established standards of practice and ethical codes*" (ICN, 2025).

The new nursing definition provided by ICN is extensive, contemporary, and consistent with definitions and standards of international professional nursing organizations. It includes fundamental features of nursing as a scientific discipline, an ethical and humanitarian profession, and an essential component of the health system. It would appear that the new definition emphasizes holistic, people-centered approaches to care, therapeutic interpersonal relationships, and evidence-informed governance and practice, with universally valued concepts. The definition describes the wide scope of nursing practice, including health promotion and prevention, acute care, chronic care, and end-of-life care. The new definition recognizes the entirety of services performed by nurses across the lifespan and in various health contexts, as nurses contribute in a multitude of roles and health care settings.

The new definition broadens from traditional "bedside" care to include advocacy, leadership, education, research, policy, and systems. This signifies that nurses are contributing even more new roles in health care. The definition includes ethical principles and values, such as compassion, social justice, and cultural safety, which speak to a professional ethical or moral safeguard. The definition also considers issues of equitable access to health, safe and sustainable environments, and public health, by linking nursing into global social objectives. The definition also implies autonomy, a key characteristic for a developed and professional discipline, and partnership with individuals and other professions and practices. The definition is also forward-looking and highlights continuous learning and research; creativity; and critical thinking and adaptability, which are features of a profession that continues to evolve within the health care system.

The Difference between the New and Previous Definitions

The ICN definition of nursing is substantially different from the previous definition in both breadth and depth, reflecting the development of the profession and embracing contemporary global health targets. Historical definitions of nursing, to varying degrees, were predominantly focused on a nurse's responsibility to directly care for patients in a hospital context or under a medical authority; however, recent definitions are more autonomous, broad, and multi-modal in scope. They purposefully acknowledge care provision in relation to leadership, advocacy, health system management, education, research, and policy. This reconstitutes nurses as the key decision-makers and drivers of change in the health care system, rather than the erstwhile definition that represented them as merely the implementers of physician-directed care.

The wording of the current definition is more inclusive overall. It appears to emphasize and recognize nursing's commitment to health equity, social justice, cultural safety, and sustainable health care in societies. Nurses are acknowledged as regulated professionals who draw on evidence-informed knowledge, ethics, and therapeutic relationships with teams, while also recognizing the realities of a global health system and population health and well-being. The updated definition acknowledges nursing as a profession, shifting from a description of tasks to an acknowledgment of the scope, complexity, and societal value of the profession in a rapidly changing society.

Addressing Current Nursing Issues and Global Health Trends

The latest ICN definition of nursing responds to contemporary nursing challenges. It aligns with global health trends by providing a comprehensive and future-oriented framework to redefine the scope, identity, and impact of the profession. The framework addresses ongoing workforce issues, such as global nursing shortages and burnout. It highlights a standardized, independent scope of practice that will ease international mobility, enhance professional recognition, and support effective workforce planning. Also, it acknowledges the urgent need for health equity, focusing on equitable, culturally safe, and people-centered care, and is committed to social justice in health care for diverse and underserved populations amid increasing global migration patterns and profound health inequalities. In addition, it recognizes the importance of social and environmental determinants of health through explicit references to planetary health, sustainability, and population health advocacy, all of which are becoming priority areas in public health and are pressing global crises, such as climate change and pandemics.

The new ICN nursing definition acknowledges the rapidly changing health care environment, emphasizing evidence-informed practice, interprofessional teamwork, and digital health readiness, while expanding the nurse's role in areas of leadership, education, policy, research, and innovation. This evolution of the definition not only counters the outdated concept of nursing as a series of tasks, but also empowers nurses to be agents of systemic change by actively developing and implementing solutions to complex health challenges affecting populations, including anti-microbial resistance, non-communicable diseases, and emergency preparedness. The new definition of nursing also directly supports the principles of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which seeks to ensure that all individuals have access to the full spectrum of necessary health services from prevention to palliation without experiencing financial hardship (WHO, 2026). Furthermore, this conceptualization resonates with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a collective framework dedicated to fostering global well-being and harmony. By embracing this expanded role, nursing is uniquely positioned to deepen its contributions toward the establishment of equitable, resilient, and sustainable health systems worldwide, thereby advancing the core ambitions of both UHC and the SDGs.

Distinguishing Nursing from Other Disciplines

The new definition of nursing distinguishes it from other professions, because nursing manifests a scientific specialization, ethical responsibility and a humanistic way of caring for people. While many professions are founded and respected, because they require specialized knowledge and ethical codes, nursing is uniquely characterized by its fundamental commitment to compassion, social justice, and equity. Furthermore, nurses deliver essential professional care in highly vulnerable clinical encounters by combining science-based disciplinary knowledge with therapeutic relationships. This holistic and multi-dimensional model of practice goes well beyond simply performing clinical tasks. Nurses are caregivers, educators, advocates, leaders, researchers and innovators working across all settings and life stages.

Additionally, the definition articulates the complementary aspects of supporting and developing health literacy, dignity, and culturally safe environments, highlighting not only nursing's responsibility to individuals, but also to communities and populations. Ultimately, nurses are uniquely situated to take on roles and work autonomously or act in collaboration with other health care professionals. This positions nurses as professionals closely connected to individuals, families, and communities on the front lines, enabling them to bring their unique perspectives on lived experiences to influence the health system and health care policies. This broad, people-centered, and ethically responsible scope of practice collectively transforms nursing and distinguishes it as a distinctive profession practice in the global health system.

Impact of New Definition

The revised ICN definition of nursing has a profound impact on several disciplines, revolutionizing education, practice, policy, research, and regulation on a global scale.

Education

Academically, the 2025 ICN definition establishes an essential baseline for the global standardization of nursing education. It has paved the way for competency-based curriculum that emphasizes evidence-based

practice, ethical judgement, cultural safety, leadership, and advocacy. By committing to people-centered, holistic care, the definition encourages nursing programs to broaden their competencies to encompass inter-disciplinary collaboration, population health, and sustainability. The values of lifelong learning and critical thinking skills are demonstrated in equipping nurses to address the complexity of modern health care systems. The definition also states the necessity of formalized education pathways for unregulated practice and stresses the increased need for investment in nursing education and leadership. Although these expanded competencies are intended to promote global educational uniformity, their implementation in developing and transitional healthcare systems, such as that of Jordan, encounters significant structural barriers, including critical deficits in funding, faculty development, and clinical infrastructure.

Practice

Clinically, the revised ICN definition of nurse and nursing revealed a shift from task-based care to autonomous practice, formally integrating the leadership role in public health, population health, and sustainability into the daily nursing scope. In addition, it standardizes credentials and practice roles and enables Global Mobility for nurses to practice beyond their geographical borders and to participate in global health initiatives. It is also a cycle towards collaborative, accountable, patient-centered care and gives more capacity to inter-professional collaboration, facilitates patient safety as roles become more distinct. Beyond bedside care, nurses are now being placed in roles as health promoters and crisis responders; however, realizing this multi-modal vision, particularly in systems like Jordan's, requires a systematic transformation to overcome implementation challenges, including rigid administrative hierarchies, chronic staff shortages, and a lack of legislative support for advanced practice roles.

Policy

At a policy level, the 2025 ICN definition establishes a unified direction that integrates broader nursing roles into both national and international health laws. This transition requires policymakers to officially incorporate the nursing profession into essential areas, like mental health prescribing and emergency response planning. In addition, connecting nursing roles to UHC and SDGs enhances the profession's influence in advocating for workers' rights, clarifying scopes of practice, and fostering robust health systems.

Importantly, it provides policy regulators with independent and consistent criteria for defining nursing competencies, scopes of practice, and licensing practices. It will drive regulated workforce planning globally through enhanced recognition of credentials and cross-border mobility, permitting a more optimal workforce response during global health emergencies. The concept supports the mechanism for developing comprehensive and rigorous standards that protect the public and ensure quality of care that is prioritized on safety, ethics, and cultural safety. However, realizing the full potential of this policy, particularly in the Middle East, requires strong international collaboration and alignment of regional legislative frameworks to ensure legal protection and advancement of nursing autonomy.

Research

Within the research domain, the new definition provides an integrated framework that accelerates international knowledge sharing and the dissemination of innovative, evidence-based nursing models. Importantly, the definition sets out the breadth and values of the profession which, in essence, will inform and encourage for more accurate workforce research, including globally identifying nursing shortages and education needs. While this paradigm elevates the global standing of nursing research, effective implementation requires immediate and ongoing investment in workforce development and research infrastructure, particularly in resource-constrained environments. This broad description encourages exploration in emerging fields, such as digital health, global health, health inequities, and health system reform. The definition likewise promotes better recognition of nursing research nationally and globally, but again to advance the advancement of nursing research and its role in health, ongoing investment to fund nursing research, workforce capacity and support for research and infrastructure is needed, particularly in low-resource settings.

Utilization of the New Definition in Jordan

The revised ICN definitions of "nursing" and "a nurse" include significant potential to advance the nursing profession and the overall healthcare system in

Jordan, a country with a strong nursing presence and a long history of organizational growth. The definitions provide a mechanism to enhance professional identity, drive reform in schooling, and influence health policy by explicitly defining nursing functions, competencies, and responsibilities. This provides the Jordanian Nursing Council (JNC) with an opportunity to enhance workforce planning and regulatory activities, address staffing deficiencies, improve resource allocation, and promote the professional mobility of Jordanian nurses locally and in the global market. The definition of nursing provides a foundation to embed nursing into national legislation, which would create consistency and clarity in the legal and regulatory space of nursing.

The definition strongly aligns with Jordan's specific healthcare needs, particularly regarding the significant refugee population, by supporting inter-professional collaboration, culturally appropriate treatment, and patient-centered care. The progressive vision contained in ththeeir definition regarding leadership, advocacy, population health, and evidence-based practice supports Jordan's overarching goals to transform its healthcare system, develop advanced practice nursing roles, and enable nurses to actively shape health policy, research, and sustainable development in line with global priorities, such as UHC and SDGs.

While the new ICN definition provides a comprehensive strategic framework for advancing the nursing profession in Jordan, deeply rooted systemic challenges may impede its effective implementation. The persistence of a physician-led hierarchy in healthcare settings is one notable challenge that limits nurses' autonomy, acknowledgement, and decision-making. The advanced practice roles and nurse practitioners are not currently recognized or regulated by law in Jordan, which limits their ability to practice at the highest level of their education. Continued nursing shortages in Jordan increase workloads, burnout, and job dissatisfaction due to declining incomes, limited resources, and a growing lack of support in clinical environments.

The pressures facing the economy and the need to care for a large immigrant population strain the health care system and make it difficult to consider investing in the workforce changes required to meet their new expectations. Additionally, variations in the quality of nursing education, evident in differing accreditation statuses (e.g. ACEN accreditation), the availability of simulation laboratories, disparities in technological infrastructure, and the extensive retraining required to meet the new competency expectations create another layer of challenges. Advances in autonomous, culturally safe nursing practice may be hampered by embedded cultural norms and the public's inability to recognize contemporary aspects of nursing practice. There continue to be regulatory, legal, and credentialing obstacles that impede immigrant nurses' ability to join the workforce. Nursing organizations need to be active partners in shaping public perceptions and systematic change throughout and beyond the Jordanian Nursing Council's (JNC) strategic aim. Absent significant government investment and engagement, and the development of a stronger advocacy base, these challenges may greatly limit Jordan's ability to fully realize the transformative benefits that new nursing practice standards will bring.

Although the new definition promotes international mobility, it may exacerbate the brain drain in developing countries such as Jordan. Without the overcoming of physician-led hierarchies and the adoption of advanced practice frameworks, well-qualified Jordanian nurses are likely to seek employment in other countries that offer the professional independence and compensation associated with these new global standards.

Recommendations

Implementing the 2025 ICN definitions of “nursing” and “a nurse” requires a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach involving global regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and national policymakers. To engage stakeholders, the National Nursing Associations (NNAs) should have discussions with nurses, healthcare professionals, and the public to engage in active discussion to achieve consensus on the changes to nursing practice to raise awareness about the change of meaning in connection to patient care, health systems, and public advocacy. These discussions can also inform changes required to codes of ethics, practice standards, and/or competencies to enable implementations of the definitions to be practically supported through education, training, resources, and workshops for nurses for application of the definitions at the point of care or practice. Also, It is important that national regulatory bodies, especially the Jordanian Nursing Council (JNC), revise the scopes of practice, licensure requirements,

and core competencies to ensure alignment with these new definitions.

These definitions should inform regulatory systems in a manner as to delineate the scope of practice of regulated nurses rather than unregulated caregivers, as well as facilitating accountability for system-wide mechanisms to enable safe, ethical, and quality care. Regulators must also engage with more systemic considerations to enable equitable access to nursing education and access to licensure for all under-represented and under-served populations. Tools like the International Classification for Nursing Practice (ICNP), for example, give a common framework, so that nurses can share the same language for nursing documentation, which can enable data sharing and consistency when working with partners across borders.

And finally, academic institutions and leaders should strive to modify nursing-school programs to include the above definitions, with increased emphasis on ethics, safety, advocacy for vulnerable populations, global health, and leadership. Lifelong learning is achievable through continuing education and professional development opportunities to prepare nurses for increasing roles in advancing health systems. Institutions should intentionally cultivate a culture of nursing research to evaluate the new definitions' impact on clinical practice and workforce sustainability, and patient outcomes to improve education and increase the evidence base for nursing as a discipline.

Internationally, the World Health Organization (WHO) should consider recognizing the definitions as global standards for countries to adopt and include in their core international health policy efforts. WHO has a responsibility to assist countries, especially those with developing regulatory and educational environments, to implement the meanings, create the opportunity for global knowledge sharing, and work with the ICN to monitor the use and impact of the definitions. WHO should also help clarify the distinction between licensed nurses, community health workers, and unregulated service providers to highlight each group's accountability and responsibility to healthcare.

At the same time, international organizations, like the WHO and International Labour Organization (ILO), need to update global labor policy urgently by retiring old task-oriented classifications if they are serious about legally protecting nurses' labor rights and enabling fair cross-border mobility. This will improve workforce planning at the global level, support the professional movement of nurses across systems of care and protect labor rights by ensuring equitable working conditions and appropriately assessing roles that concern nursing and nursing-adjacent fields. The ILO should harmonize all international standards, especially for nurses who are educated in under-serviced regions to improve credential recognition and access to practice internationally.

The ICN must commit to provide ongoing global stewardship of the definitions and be continuously vigilant to changes from the health practice environment and scholarship. The ICN should promote collaborative efforts for future developments on regulatory and educational benchmarks, entry-to-practice and scope of practice definitions, accreditation criteria, and management of public risk. The ICN should promote emerging research themes, including professional identity, crisis response, and equitable access to care. Using inclusive methods, such as a modified Delphi approach, ICN can ensure that a diverse representation is always considered in the on-going development of policy and scholarship; engagement with the public is just as important, since ICN can create more digestible, accessible and simplified messaging for public audiences that communicate the full scope of nursing in health care, public policy, gender equality, humanitarian issues and climate action.

Through the commitment of stakeholder awareness and action of these recommendations, the definitions become more than just descriptive, they can be transformational, providing strengthening to the profession's global identity, influence on health policy, and preparing the nurse’s practice as a healthcare leader to be part of the solutions currently facing healthcare and those likely facing it in the future.

Conclusion

The 2025 ICN definitions of “nursing” and “a nurse” include more than semantic improvements; they display a fundamental paradigm shift for the global nursing profession. By responding to the need for clarity, consistency, and future relevance, the definitions provide a navigational aid that is unified and forward-thinking with respect to the scope of nursing while retaining core nursing principles. Developed using a rigorous, widely inclusive process of extensive stakeholder engagement, and expert consensus through

the Delphi method, the definitions are inclusive of the diversity of nursing practice, and the cultural, clinical, and geographic application of nursing.

They demonstrate nursing's broader role in leadership, advocacy, ethical intervention, and system improvement, and can be categorized alongside relevant and broader global health priorities, like UHCs and the SDGs. They support workforce planning, foster mutual recognition of credentials, and encourage inter-professional collaboration. However, the greatest achievement of this visionary framework depends entirely on its rigorous adaptation to local contexts. In reforming healthcare systems, such as Jordan's, this requires the prompt, collaborative incorporation of these definitions into national regulatory frameworks, educational curricula, and clinical practice models to actively dismantle existing hierarchical barriers.

Ultimately, this revised framework redefines the nurse's role as not only a bedside caregiver, but also as an essential and dynamic architect of global health. By fully adopting this expanded definitions, the nursing profession is positioned to lead responses to complex global challenges, including systemic health inequities and humanitarian emergencies, thereby facilitating a resilient and sustainable future for global healthcare.

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