

## **Licensed Practical Nurse - Nursing Scope of Practice Variations in the Canadian Health Care System**

*Despite the variations in the defined nursing scope of practice for the licensed practical nurse and the differences in the length of education, all LPN's in Canada write the same nursing entrance test - the Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Exam*

**March 5, 2010** - [PRLog](#) -- The licensed practical nurse is one of the three legally defined types of nursing in Canada. The other two types of nursing are the registered nurse and the registered psychiatric nurse (recognized in the four Canadian western provinces only).

### Past trends

There are approximately 75,000 licensed practical nurses in Canada. When labor trends are examined it shows that the number of LPN jobs in the Canadian health care system has waxed and waned over time. This was usually in response to the job market for the registered nurse. When registered nurses are more plentiful the number of LPN jobs decreases and when the RN becomes more scarce this usually creates a demand for more licensed practical nurses.

### Contemporary trends

The nursing shortage in Canada is increasing and expected to get worse over the next ten years. The demand for nursing services will increase as the population ages and Canada has never been able to produce enough nurses to meet the demand. Once again the labor forecasts are that the demand for LPN's will increase.

### Future trends

For the first time in Canadian history the requirement for registered nursing practice in Canada is a 4 year degree. This means that it takes longer to produce a registered nurse and that they can demand more money for the work they do. The future trend in viewing the role of the licensed practical nurse will be to give more serious consideration to the education and employment of LPN's with a view to creating a nursing professional that has a distinct role in the Canadian health care system. Governments and employers alike are trying to determine the best use of the higher educated registered nurse and more clearly define the role of the LPN.

At the government level there must be attention paid to making sure that the most cost efficient practitioner is being used for the needs of the patient while at the same time protecting the interests of the Canadian public.

At the regulatory level both professions must engage in professional collaboration to clearly define their own roles and responsibilities as well as those that overlap. It stands to reason that a registered nurse educated to a university degree level is not the same practitioner as a licensed practical nurse with 1- 2 years of vocational training. Determination of what the LPN can and cannot do or should and should not do in professional nursing practice is still ongoing and varies from province to province.

What is the variation in the nursing scope of practice for LPN's across Canada?

Because health care is a provincial responsibility the regulation of nursing practice is done through

provincial legislation. The legislation in each province outlines what the legal definition of nursing is and what the nursing scope of practice is for each type of nursing. The legislation is not the same in every province and the education required for LPN jobs varies greatly so there is considerable variation across the country in the nature and scope of LPN jobs.

\* A licensed practical nurse in British Columbia can practice nursing only under the direction or supervision of an RN or medical practitioner.

\* In Ontario and Alberta the LPN works independently within a defined nursing scope of practice and does not need to be under supervision or direction of a registered nurse.

\* In Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick the LPN works under direction.

Additionally in New Brunswick the complexity of the client suitable for assignment to the Registered Nursing Assistant (this is the same classification as a LPN) is defined and it is stipulated that the RNA can assist the RN with more acutely ill patients but not take care of those patients independently.

Depending on the province and the defined nursing scope of practice, LPN jobs can be in a variety of settings including long term care, community agencies, acute care hospitals and community health centers. In all settings the LPN works in partnership with other health care providers including registered nurses and is assigned to clients who have a limited number of variables. In all provinces when the number of variables increases and the client situation becomes more complex, that client should be transferred to the care of a registered nurse.

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