



Clinical Nurse Leader: An Emerging Role for Nursing in the 21st Century

The CNL was developed by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in response to complexities of health care environments, the need to ensure safety and high standards at the point of service, as well as to meet diverse client and health care environment needs. The CNL is prepared as a master's prepared generalist accountable for clinical and health care environment outcomes. The Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) is a leader across all settings at the micro system level (patient unit, community zip code area, school setting, nursing home specific area, etc). The CNL oversees care coordination of a distinct group of patients, is a resource for clinical decision making and serves as a lateral integrator of care. This clinical leader puts evidence-based practice into action to ensure that patients benefit from the latest innovations in care delivery. The CNL collects and evaluates patient outcomes, assesses cohort risk, and has the decision-making authority to change care plans when necessary. This clinician functions as part of an interdisciplinary team by communicating, planning, and implementing care directly with other health care professionals, including physicians, pharmacists, social workers, therapists, clinical nurse specialists, and nurse practitioners. The CNL is a leader in the health care delivery system across all settings in which health care is delivered, not just the acute care setting. Implementation of this role will vary across settings.

Competencies and clinical learning experiences for CNL students are specified for each of the following CNL role components: client advocate, member of a profession, team manager, information manager, systems analyst/risk anticipator, clinician, outcomes manager, educator, and life long learner. The CNL designs and directs care within a micro system ensuring best practices are brought to the point of service and patients/clients receive timely cost efficient care. Lateral integration of services is key. The CNL is accountable for clinical and care environment outcomes as well as influencing work environments so as to increase nurse retention. The framework for the curriculum for the CNL includes the domains of leadership, clinical outcomes management, and care environment management.