POSITION STATEMENT:
Prescriptive Authority for Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses

Introduction
In increasing numbers, states are legislating prescriptive practice authority for advanced practice nurses including those who are psychiatric-mental health clinical nurse specialists and psychiatric nurse practitioners. The intent of this legislation is to increase access to health care and to utilize nurses to their full capacity as accessible, cost effective, full service providers. Each individual state, when determining rules and regulations to govern prescriptive authority for advanced practice nurses, specifies the requirements a nurse must meet in order to qualify for this aspect of practice. In general, state statutes or rules and regulations grant prescriptive authority to nurses who provide evidence of "advanced educational preparation, proof of certification from a national certifying body, a specified number of recently acquired hours of pharmacology preparation, and evidence of continuing education in the pharmacotherapeutics related to the nurse's specialty area of practice" (Talley & Brooke, 1992, p 73).

Purpose
The purpose of this document is to provide a statement of support for prescriptive practice by psychiatric nurses in advanced practice, and offer guidance to regulatory and legislative bodies with regard to the appropriate requirements that states should set for granting of prescriptive authority to advanced practice psychiatric nurses (psychiatric-mental health clinical nurse specialists and psychiatric nurse practitioners).

Background
Prescription of psychoactive medications and the adjunctive pharmacological agents that ameliorate side effects of these medications is recognized as a highly specialized nursing function. Prerequisite competencies for prescriptive activities include knowledge of neuroscience related to drug action and disorder pathology; understanding the dynamics and kinetics of psychopharmacological agents and their actions; and competency in clinical case management, including assessment, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation. The prescription of psychoactive medication also relies on knowledge of health status, co-existing physical conditions and/or medications, and other information necessary to provide a holistic plan of care for psychiatric-mental health patients in today's society (ANA, 1994a).

Position
The American Psychiatric Nurses Association supports the granting of prescriptive authority to psychiatric nurses who meet the following qualifications:

- licensure as a registered nurse (or advanced practice registered nurse) by a State Board of Nursing
- a master's degree in the field certification as a specialist by the American Nurses Credentialing Center
- demonstrated competence in physical assessment, neuroscience, and clinical psychopharmacology
Advanced Educational Preparation
"The Psychiatric-Mental Health Advanced Practice Registered Nurse is a licensed registered nurse (RN) who is educationally prepared at a master's level, at a minimum, and is distinguished by a "depth of knowledge of theory and practice, supervised clinical practice, and competence in advanced clinical nursing skills. The psychiatric-mental health advanced practice registered nurse has the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and experience autonomously to complex mental health problems" (ANA, APNA, ACAPN, & SERPN 1994b, p 11).

Professional Certification
Among the over 40,000 clinical nurse specialists currently in practice across the United States, close to 7000 are credentialed at the national level by the American Nurses Credentialing Center as Certified Specialists (RN,CS) in adult and/or child and adolescent psychiatric-mental health nursing. However, not all of these advanced practice psychiatric nurses have prescriptive authority. In some states legislation does not yet recognize psychiatric clinical nurse specialists as eligible to prescribe; in other states prescriptive authority is legalized, but not all eligible nurses have selected this intervention for their practice.

To be certified for advanced practice, the psychiatric nurse must meet the educational and clinical practice requirements of the American Nurses Credentialing Center. Nurses who meet all qualifications and pass the national certifying examination are awarded certification for five years as a Certified Specialist in either Adult or Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing. To maintain certification, the nurse must complete the certification renewal process (ANCC, 1995).

Continued Education
In addition, in order to qualify to prescribe psychoactive medications in either a complimentary or substitutive authority arrangement, advanced practice psychiatric nurses should successfully complete specialty-focused graduate level nursing courses (or their equivalent) in physical assessment, neuroscience, and clinical psychopharmacology. Demonstrated competence in these designated areas is necessary preparation for expansion of the advanced practice psychiatric nurse's role to include prescriptive authority. It is appropriate to expect that ongoing demonstration and documentation of competence through re-certification or continuing education constitute a requirement for renewal of approval for prescriptive authority.

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Bibliography


