

The Nephrology Nurse Specialist in Europe

Introduction and background

European Dialysis Transplant Nurses Association/European Renal Care Association as a European scientific organization must prioritise the development of an **EDTNA/ERCA Nephrology Nurse Specialist Position Statement in Europe**. Nurse specialists in nephrology share different job profiles across Europe in terms of education and renal specialty training, recognition of qualifications and how this corresponds to salaries. It is imperative these discrepancies are addressed and continuously promoted in the European Union (EU) and to national health care authorities in order to encourage the recognition of the Nephrology Nurse Specialist position. In 2018 as part of its educational objectives focusing on the role of the nephrology nurse, EDTNA/ERCA published 'The Profile of Nephrology Nursing' with the goal to reach all renal healthcare professionals caring for patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and to increase awareness of the role of the nephrology nurse¹.

With this Position Statement EDTNA/ERCA intends to shape the renal nurse specialist's future role and establish our Association as a key leader in nephrology nursing; the aim is to promote homogeneity in the recognition of the Nephrology Nurse Specialist position and in defining Nephrology Nurse Specialist training programmes across Europe.

The context of the nurse specialist in Europe

In recent years, there has been a growing change in healthcare settings towards a more interdisciplinary approach where the nurse has a leading role in many clinical situations due to high levels of competency and knowledge. The European Specialist Nurses Organization (ESNO) defines the 'Specialist Nurse' by including other professional terms such as Advanced Nurse Practitioner, and Nurse Practitioner for referring to nurses with Bachelor degrees or other academic education backgrounds and highly experienced nurses in certain health disciplines. According to ESNO, the role of the specialist nurse can be summarized within the following key competences: Clinical role; Patient relationships; Patient teaching and coaching; Mentoring; Research; Organization and management; Ethics and decision making; Leadership and Policymaking; Prevention². In this context nurse specialists perform duties independently and deliver care and treatments that they are often wholly accountable for under a clear and transparent regulatory framework. Over the years, nurse specialists with post-basic education and relevant professional experience have acquired the capability to respond to management, care and treatment of patients on a higher level leading to improved health outcomes. This is

achieved through research and evidence-based care. The scientific profile of nurse specialists is the one that predominately offers long lasting results and a well-established recognition of the profession.

As noted recently in a statement from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the evolving roles of the nurse specialists, the challenge for nurse specialists in moving forward is to realize the benefits of moving away from a medical model of care towards adopting a holistic nursing approach in terms of education, assessment, care and research in order to achieve the best patient outcomes³. In Europe and worldwide there is an important demand for preserving and supporting the quality of healthcare led by highly educated nursing professionals supported by EU recognised standards of education.

The context of Nephrology Nursing Specialist in Europe

Nephrology nursing is a specialty dedicated to preventing, protecting and improving the health of individuals with kidney disease and injury, fostering healing and alleviating distress. Nephrology nurses advocate for the care of people, families, communities and populations affected by kidney disease which includes both CKD and Acute Kidney Injury (AKI)⁴. CKD affects between 11% - 13% of the world population⁵ and AKI affects 20 % adults during a hospital episode of care⁶. Annually, an estimated 5–10 million people die from kidney disease including around 1.7 million people where death is caused by AKI⁷.

2.62 million people worldwide received dialysis in 2010, and by 2030 the need for dialysis is expected to double⁸. The significant global increase of diabetes, obesity and hypertension has contributed to an escalating prevalence of CKD and End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD), synonymous with enormous economic burden⁷. Furthermore, these diseases are significant risk factors for cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of mortality in CKD⁹. Many patients with CKD and AKI present with multiple co-morbidities and will require the specialist care of an entire multidisciplinary team. This includes nephrologists, nurses, dieticians or nutritionists, social workers and psychologists. However, many healthcare systems do not offer these specialist resources, and it is often the nephrology nurse who is required and expected to act and assume the role as care coordinator and advocate to ensure patients and their families get access to the services, information and education that they require¹⁰.

The majority of nephrology nurses work with patient populations having diagnosed kidney disease. Nephrology nurses also work in the community dealing with the prevention and early identification of kidney disease. In addition to this, similar to other specialties, nephrology

nurses are called to address the increasing ageing population and the subsequent associated increased comorbidities. In order to respond to these expanding and complex demands for patient care and service improvement, nephrology nursing education and training, roles and responsibilities have thus been developed, ensuring that services are patient-centred and of the highest quality. The significant contribution of nephrology nurses to healthcare through improvements in patient wellbeing, quality outcomes, safe standards of care and reduced cost, is well documented¹¹.

Nephrology Nurse Specialists are highly knowledgeable and skilled to deliver care through disease management interventions and broader care approaches. They practise in a variety of multidisciplinary environments using critical thinking skills and promote as such optimal outcomes for patients with kidney disease¹.

Recommendation for recognition of the Nephrology Nurse Specialist role in Europe

In view of the requirement for quality assurance in nephrology nursing to provide safe and appropriate patient care during a period of unprecedented shortage of nurses globally (nephrology nurses included) combined with significant austerity policies in healthcare budgets, nephrology nursing as a speciality must be well established and recognised throughout Europe.

Our aim is to implement a comprehensive plan to create a standardized system for recognizing Nephrology Nurse Specialists across Europe. Over the past years there have been significant developments with some Nephrology Nurse Specialists educated to Masters Level. Nevertheless, this academic framework is not harmonized as there are countries in Europe, where the nephrology nursing specialty does not officially exist. Therefore, there is a strong need for equal level of formal education and curricula leading to the same level of professional quality and recognition in Europe.

The EDTNA/ERCA calls on national healthcare authorities and the EU to invest in formal education of Nephrology Nurse Specialists and to implement cross-border regulatory frameworks towards a legal and harmonized position of Nephrology Nurse Specialists in each country.

There is a high demand for the establishment of a recognised European title for Nephrology Nurse Specialist combined with a clear definition of Nephrology Nurse Specialist roles and responsibilities. This can be easily achieved through certification of advanced nephrology nursing educational programmes recognised across Europe. This process should be in

alignment with ESNO in terms of the ongoing accredited Continuing Professional Development programme (CPD) ² and the ESNO developed Common Training Framework ‘*Competences of the Nurse Specialist (NS): Common plinth of competences for a Common Training Framework of each specialty*’ ¹².

Recognition of the role of Nephrology Nurse Specialists as experts within healthcare is vital and fundamental to providing high standard patient care to people with kidney disease. Recognition will lead to the advancement of evidence-based nephrology nursing practice and subsequently to economic and health benefits of the society.

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