

Mental Health Nursing

Competence and Career Framework



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Foreword

by Professor Mark Radford, Chief Nurse, Health Education England

The unique value of mental health nursing

Mental health nursing is a demanding but rewarding career choice, occupying a unique space in holistic patient care at the forefront of healthcare service delivery.

Across the board, we have seen the passion, commitment and potential in our mental health nursing workforce, and the vital contribution mental health nurses make to the delivery of care is now getting the recognition it deserves.

Mental health nurses provide a range of functional interventions, advice, support and assessment that assist service users and their families, at the most vulnerable times in their lives, through recovery to maintain independence and quality of life.

They work in a variety of settings, supporting and providing care to people experiencing emotional distress, irrespective of a formal diagnosis of a mental illness or

disorder. They work with patients and service users in all age groups, and commonly have roles in diverse settings, including in residential settings and the community.

This includes primary, secondary and tertiary care, to give specialised treatment, requiring diverse and specialist roles, to care for and support people, their families and carers accessing mental health services. It is this breadth of opportunity and possibility that affords someone who is thinking of becoming a mental health nurse a full career that can concentrate on the whole person, their quality of life and a co-produced approach to recovery that makes sense to an individual.

Why this Framework?

When people consider entering the nursing professions per se, and even for nurse registrants themselves, it's often difficult for them to get clear information on what additional competencies they need to enable them to make progress in their careers.



This difficulty can be compounded by variation across the country in mental health nursing postgraduate education and training, coupled with inconsistent access to a formal dedicated career pathway.

To tackle this variation, HEE's New Roles in Mental Health Programme commissioned Skills for Health to produce this national competency and career framework for mental health nurses across England. It provides a much-needed guide to sustain post-registration, postgraduate education and continuing professional development. It will also help those thinking about a career in nursing or healthcare to consider mental health nursing as a career choice or direction.

Inspiring and sharing good practice

The Framework clearly sets out the core and additional competencies necessary for the variety of nursing roles that are required to deliver modern and transformational resources to users of mental health services. It helps to articulate mental health nurses' sense of identity and how we plan to expand their role, to ensure that people with mental health difficulties are treated with dignity, respect and receive the care and support they need and deserve.

That's why its introduction is so welcome and will support the development of a national mental health nursing workforce, with the emphasis on safety, quality, effectiveness and career satisfaction.

We hope that our mental health nursing colleagues – registered mental health nurses, practice assessors, and practice supervisors – will be inspired and encouraged by the content of this Framework, to share the good practices described, and to develop their own career and that of others.

A guide for employers

The Framework will also be a useful guide for employers to encourage a diversity of applications, including people with lived experience, by describing what mental health nurses do, and the skills, knowledge and abilities they need to carry out this role. This is in line with HEE's commitment to a diverse and inclusive workforce which can provide person-centred, culturally appropriate care.

HEE will continue to work with partners in Arm's Length Bodies and system wide, to ensure that mental health nurses have the right knowledge, skills, education and training required to deliver this vision.

Thank you

I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to Skills for Health, HEE colleagues and the nursing staff, experts, experts by experiences and organisations who have worked so hard to bring this vital piece of work to fruition.



Professor Mark Radford
Chief Nurse, HEE

Introduction

Being a mental health nurse is a rewarding career choice, occupying a unique space at the forefront of healthcare service delivery. Mental health nurses provide functional assessment, interventions, advice and support that assist individuals, their families and carers, including at the most vulnerable times in their lives, through recovery to maintain independence and quality of life.

Mental health nurses support and provide care to people experiencing emotional distress, irrespective of a formal diagnosis of a mental illness or disorder. They support colleagues to better meet individual need across the life course, from children and adolescents to adults and older people, delivering a range of mental healthcare in a variety of settings in the public, independent and voluntary sectors. These can include:

■ Primary care

GP surgeries, primary care wellness centres, community healthcare centres, and in education, employment and housing settings.

■ Secondary care

Commonly in people's own homes and inpatient mental health settings, but also in collaboration with social care, the police, hospitals and other health and social care environments.

■ Other types of care

Including secure forensic services, prisons, the courts and specialist inpatient treatment facilities for addiction, eating disorders, or other specific needs. As in physical health, there are many mental health issues that need specialised treatment, requiring diverse and specialist roles to care for and support individuals, their families and carers accessing mental health services.

Mental health nursing offers a breadth of opportunity and possibility for a long and successful career founded on a holistic approach to treating the whole person, their quality of life and a co-produced version of recovery.

This national core competence and career framework for mental health nursing across England has been developed to ensure a more consistent approach to career development, and to reduce variation in post-registration learning and development. It should also enable everyone to realise the contribution that mental health nurses make to the delivery of high-quality services, to the experience of individuals and to wider society.



The Framework assists both people considering entering the mental health nursing profession and existing mental health nurse registrants to see how they can gain additional, clearly defined core competencies to enable them to progress in their careers, and to see that this is an inspiring career.

The Mental Health Nursing Competence and Career Framework (The Framework) sets out a vision for mental health nurses in a consistent way to ensure safety, quality and effectiveness, and specifies the core competencies required to deliver modern and transformational mental health services to individuals, their families and carers.

The Framework aims to:

- identify the core competencies of knowledge, skills and behaviours required for mental health nursing at each level of the wider Career Framework for Health from levels 5 to 8 (see [Appendix 1](#) for more information about the health career framework);
- provide opportunities to inspire mental health nurses when they read the competence and career framework, to quickly adopt the good practices described, and also to inspire them in how to develop their own career and that of others;
- highlight the particular contribution that mental health nurses make, and shape the way forward for mental health nursing across England, by setting out a clear vision and aspirations, which are all underpinned by key strategies and policies in the system;
- articulate mental health nurses' sense of identity; how the role is expanding to ensure that people with mental health difficulties are treated with dignity and respect and receive the care and support they need and deserve;
- include clarity on the 'unique selling point' (USP) and uniqueness of mental health nursing, and the breadth and diversity of career opportunities available, working in different sectors, settings and specialties; and
- inspire new applicants to the field of mental health nursing to see it as a long-term, fulfilling career.

More information on how the Framework was produced is set out in [Appendix 2](#).



About

Scope of the Framework

The Framework sets out to define the *core competencies* at each level of the health career framework, which covers the registered mental health nurse at level 5, through senior roles at level 6, advanced practice at level 7, nurse consultant at level 8 and to the director at level 9.

What is a competency?

Within the Framework, a competency articulates the required *core* knowledge, skills and behaviours that individuals need to bring to the workplace to be able to work at a certain level of practice. This is more than just being able to consistently perform to defined standards in the workplace; it means also having the required underpinning knowledge and the right attitudes and behaviours to be able to undertake the role of a mental health nurse. This enables the individual to work in both stable environments with familiar and complex problems and, beyond this, to work effectively in situations that may be complex and require flexibility and creativity, as their career progresses.

The Framework recognises competencies as having both combined and separate statements about the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to work at each level as a mental health nurse.

What is a career framework? (See Appendix 1)

A career framework provides:

- *consistency* – as an enabling tool that provides a common, consistent language and currency to support career development;
- *a definition of the career level* with characteristics and attributes ascribed to it that describe, for example, the amount of responsibility, complexity of thinking and level of decision making required;
- *competence* – the core competencies of knowledge, skills and behaviours required at each level;
- *progression* – providing individuals with a means to articulate their achievements and identify options available to develop their core knowledge and skills and progress their careers, both vertically and horizontally within the same or into the next career level;

- *transferability* across the public, independent and voluntary sectors that is not just NHS-focused; and
- *indicative education and training* for each level of the career framework for health, which will also assist mental health nurses to see what is required at each level to progress.

What is it not?

- The Framework is not a 'roles' framework, but describes the core competencies required by an individual across the whole framework at each career framework level.
- There is no automatic read-across from the NHS Agenda for Change pay bands to the career framework levels; it instead concentrates on the career level competencies. This makes it more flexible for all organisations to use, whether in the public, independent or voluntary sector.
- The Framework does not describe individual roles, but concentrates on the core competencies required for all roles across each level with a clinical focus, demonstrating the range of opportunity for career progression in mental health nursing.

Related professional and regulatory frameworks and other key documents are listed in the bibliography ([see Appendix 3](#)).

Structure of the Framework

The Framework will be organised around **four pillars of practice** and will be specific to mental health nursing. These are:

1. Clinical practice
2. Education and the facilitation of learning
3. Leadership and development
4. Research, evidence and development.

The emphasis on each pillar will vary according to the career framework level.

Mental health nurses can view the required core competencies and education requirements at each level of the Framework and be able to plan careers and identify continuing professional development and education and training needs.

Organisations can also utilise the core competencies at each level as the basis to develop new individual roles going forward, with the emphasis depending on the role. So, for example, a role requiring predominantly clinical skills at each level will use mostly core competencies from the clinical practice pillar and a more leadership-focused role will utilise mostly competencies from the leadership pillar.

In turn, the Framework will assist education providers in understanding the core competencies required at each level when designing learning programmes.

Who is the Framework for?

The main audiences for the Framework are:

- Registered mental health nurses – both current and potential future nurses;
- Managers and employers;
- Education and training commissioners and providers;
- Practice assessors;
- Practice supervisors;
- Nurse educators; and
- Academic assessors.

How the Framework relates to other frameworks

The need for this framework arose from the requirement to bring together a range of information about mental health nursing, focussing on the core competencies required for each level of the health career framework, as well as articulating the unique selling point (USP) and uniqueness of being a mental health nurse. It will

help to not only attract people into the profession but also to retain current staff by demonstrating the career opportunities available.

Related competence, capability and career frameworks exist, both currently and in development, along with other relevant documentation such as related education and learning. This new Framework is intended to complement, rather than replace, these.

Leadership in mental health nursing

The Framework has been developed by level, not by role, with the focus on the core set of competencies at each level of the health career framework within mental health nursing. So, the core competencies articulated have been expressed for level 5 through level 9 to demonstrate that mental health nurses can progress to this executive level and be the clinical expert beyond their own organisation. All levels demonstrate the clinical focus of mental health nursing. Within the four pillars, a leadership pillar articulates the core competencies required at each level of the Framework for leadership.

Progression can also be via leadership roles in mental health, and mental health nurses may choose to follow this route.

There are numerous separate leadership frameworks and related education and training packages available that mental health nurses can follow. These will vary depending on the individual and their employer's preference and are too numerous to list. This Framework has not focused on the leadership pathway for career progression but on the core competencies within mental health nursing for a clinical route.





enabler
 team working shared decision making supporting
 self-aware making a difference collaboration connecting with people
 every day is different problem solving evidence-based
 thinker creative reflective listener
 giving hope curious autonomous parity of esteem
 finding hope variety encouraging less hierarchical
 independent practitioner holistic engagement non-judgemental
 good communicator person-centred life-transforming



What is the unique selling point (USP) and uniqueness of a career in mental health nursing?

Mental health nursing is indeed a unique and varied profession; however, MH nurses themselves often find it difficult to fully explain its uniqueness. Certainly, professional and therapeutic ways to create feelings of safety predominate in the literature:

“Mental health nurses offer person-centred and evidence-based therapeutic interventions, create safe places of positive asylum and give expert professional help to those in mental distress and their families.”

(Foundation of Nursing Studies, 2017)

In developing this Framework, the views were sought from many mental health nurses across the different career levels on what had attracted them to enter, remain in and progress their career in the profession. We asked them what they would like to share with

anyone thinking of entering mental health nursing, and with colleagues, about the opportunities for progression in the field. Here are some of the things they said:

“Mental health nursing must be one of the few professions which really values your uniqueness as an individual – if you are curious, dynamic, and interested by the complexities of the human mind, love talking to and helping people, are a listener and a thinker then it allows you a scope of development and growth of self.”

“I entered mental health nursing because of the collaboration, innovation, creativity and diversity of the role – I like people and working in a team and knowing that our work really does make a difference to individuals’ lives and that of their family and carers. When I see them recovering it is so rewarding to know ‘I contributed to that’.”

“I continually feel very privileged to be part of people’s lives. There is no other job where I can be of use to others using the skills and experiences that make me... me. It is an honour to work with other caring colleagues and with service users and their families to make things better – it’s a marriage of head, heart and hands!”

“I love that mental health nursing allows me autonomous decision-making and to work as an independent practitioner and that it is less hierarchical and not task-led like other nursing.”

“I was inspired to become a mental health nurse as it reflects my personal values, social and ethical views on equality and diversity and wanted to make a difference – I am still encouraged by the same things that attracted me to the profession and by the positive change in the drive towards parity of esteem for individuals.”

“Mental health nursing is unique in that it has a holistic approach in treating the whole person and understanding their personal narratives using therapeutic skills to dig deeper. It is real patient engagement rather than just being ‘task-based’ – you don’t just ‘treat’ but help individuals grow as people and also enable them to have a voice to hold their mental healthcare in parity of esteem with physical healthcare.”

"I like connecting with people across life experiences from the mundane daily tasks of life through to extremes of fear, distress, anger and elation and am really struck by the difference good communication and compassionate nursing can make."

"Mental health nursing truly offers the opportunity to carve out a career that matches your interests, strengths and personal philosophy with the diversity and versatility of a huge range of different settings, areas of practice and branches you can work in. It also allows you to continue to progress [the career levels] and to move into other related areas in mental health nursing such as research and education, as well as higher level clinical practice or leadership."

"It's a rewarding career because you are helping the individual to understand their world and seek their own solutions."

"The service users with mental health difficulties and problems are brilliant and are very rewarding to work with."

"Mental health nursing offers a career for life. As I have progressed [up the different levels] I remain a mental health nurse to the core."

"Working collaboratively, forming a trusting relationship with our patients to find hope in their situations, is the foundation of mental health nursing."

"Mental health nursing is unique in that you are able to flex across professional boundaries, holding the multidisciplinary team together whilst still being a discreet part."

"Mental health nursing is the best career you can have – it enables you to engage people, seek advice, and the non-judgemental approach enables this."

"A career in mental health nursing allows continuous learning and development based on a robust evidence base – every day is different."

"I have worked in mental health nursing for 40 years and would make the same career choice again!"

Areas of practice within mental health

A career in mental health nursing provides the opportunity to work with a wide spectrum of ages and mental health needs, and in an extensive range of areas of practice, branches and different settings. Examples are provided below, which are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but to give a flavour of the diversity available for a career in mental health nursing.

Perinatal mental health (PNMH)

PNMH problems are those that occur during pregnancy or in the first year following the birth of a child. Perinatal mental illness affects up to 20% of new and expectant mums and covers a wide range of conditions. There are now specialist PNMH community services in all local NHS areas in England.

Good quality, evidence-based perinatal mental healthcare pathways are shown to improve access to evidence-based treatment with greater detection and improved recovery rates, improving outcomes for women, their children and the family.

Mental health nurses working in the specialist PNMH environment, whether that be in a mother and baby unit or in a specialist community team, have an opportunity to work with whole families, and concentrate especially on the pivotal attachment between parents and their children, improving outcomes for not only this generation but the next. Collaboration with maternity and health visiting colleagues, as well as a wider multidisciplinary team, makes this an especially cooperative role for the mental health nurse.

Additional information:

- NHS England. Perinatal mental health: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/perinatal/>

Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

CAMHS teams work with children and young people who have mental health needs or difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. Young people and their parents and carers receive direct support.

Mental health nurses are trained to care for and support young people. This could be in an inpatient care unit and involve the general day-to-day running of the unit, as well as delivering clinical and therapeutic support, ensuring

basic healthcare needs are met, or in an outpatient therapy and daycare service.

Additional information:

- Royal College of Nursing. [Mental health nursing](#)
- NHS. [Child and adolescent mental health services](#)

Older people

Older people, like the wider population, may well experience mental health issues. These may be long-standing acknowledged mental health conditions or more recent developments, such as depression related to bereavement, chronic conditions and dementia. One in four people annually will experience mental health difficulties, that can often be mistakenly attributed to the ageing process. Older people can find accessing services that meet their needs difficult, but nurses are well placed to identify the impact of mental health difficulties and signpost or support people to access the help they need. Increasingly, the divisions between mental and physical health services are being overcome, and the multidisciplinary approach to care for older people means mental health nurses have an increasing role in working collaboratively to improve mental wellbeing.

Mental health nurses will be skilled in recognising the effects of mental health issues on the lives of older adults and help them to gain assistance with the most health benefit.

In addition to reducing the impact of mental health problems on daily activities, it is important that mental health nurses also support older people in preventive strategies.

Additional information:

- Royal College of Nursing. Mental health in later life: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/older-people/mental-health-in-later-life>

Urgent and emergency care

An individual can experience a mental health crisis when they have feelings or experiences that feel very painful or difficult to manage, which can include suicidal feelings, self-harm, panic attacks, flashbacks, psychosis (such as paranoia or hearing voices) or other feelings. Some people feel in a crisis as part of ongoing mental health issues, or due to stressful and difficult life experiences such as abuse, bereavement, addiction, money or housing problems.

Experiencing mental distress and a deteriorating mental state requires urgent care to prevent a decline in the mental state that can result in harm.

The mental health nurse can provide crisis support. In the immediacy, A&E liaison, walk-in centres and street triage staff are able to provide 'blue light' responses to mental health crises. Further assessment and ongoing support is provided more often at home, which could be as part of a community crisis resolution team, who may also offer intensive home-based treatment. This support enables individuals, who may otherwise have gone into hospital, to remain in their home or elsewhere in the community such as a crisis house offering short-term support, or a day centre. Such crisis support can also help individuals already in hospital to be discharged more quickly. Support can include assisting with self-help strategies, medication, practical support with housing and childcare, and care planning to prevent this happening again. Mental health nurses are increasingly based in GP surgeries and other settings such as hospital A&E departments.

Outside of the crisis response, mental health professionals now routinely occupy roles within acute physical care settings. Liaison teams provide advice, support and education within physical care environments, and mental health nurses are employed in the majority.

Additional information:

- Case study of a mental health nurse working in a crisis team – Jill Lewis, mental health nurse: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/capitalnurse/nurses-stories>

Eating disorders

An eating disorder is when a person's eating habits and relationship with food become difficult, affecting physical health, and can also be detrimental both emotionally and socially. The most common eating disorders are: anorexia nervosa (restricted food intake and/or excessive exercise), bulimia nervosa (binge eating followed by deliberate purging), and binge eating disorder (BED) (episodes of overeating in a short space of time). Eating disorders often occur alongside other mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and substance misuse disorders.

Mental health nurses can assess, treat, develop care plans and carry out reviews for individuals. Settings in which they work include an outpatient, community-based, age-appropriate eating disorder service, medical inpatient or day patient service for medical stabilisation and to ensure

adequate nutritional intake. In addition, they will help individuals to develop a more realistic and self-affirming body image and help educate family members on their role in recovery maintenance.

Additional information:

- Mental Health UK. [Eating disorders](#)

Addictions

There are many areas where individuals develop addictions. Devastating socioeconomic consequences of addictions to gambling and debt are only just becoming fully recognised, alongside the psychological consequences. Mental health nurses are providing care and treatment in specialist teams, together with their colleagues offering help for perhaps the more commonly known problematic alcohol and drug misuse. Many individuals have 'dual diagnoses', where addiction problems are formally recognised alongside other mental health problems.

Mental health nurses can work in many settings, such as primary and secondary care, A&E departments, police custody suites, prisons, needle and syringe programmes, and homelessness services. Nurses working in addiction services can make positive contributions to achieving a range of health and social care outcomes by delivering a series of interventions which, alongside evidence-based psychological interventions, can also include: physical and mental health triage, assessment and care – nurses can bring enhanced awareness of mental and physical health comorbidities; the management of infections and adverse effects relating to poor injecting practice; hepatitis B vaccination and blood-borne virus (BBV) testing; dispensing, monitoring and reporting on effects of medicines (with non-medical nurse prescribers being able to prescribe medicines); the identification and management of alcohol-related liver disease; and the management of alcohol-related dementia.

Additional information:

- Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Public Health England (2017). [The role of nurses in alcohol and drug treatment services: A resource for commissioners, providers and clinicians](#)

The competencies and education indicative minimum professional/educational and training requirements for levels 5–9

Level 5

Overview

Working at this level requires a comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge. It requires the ability to use knowledge to solve problems creatively, make judgements that require analysis and interpretation, and actively contribute to service and self-development. Nurses at this level may have responsibility for supervision of appropriate staff or training, and will be expected to develop leadership skills.

Example reference titles: **registered mental health nurse, inpatient staff nurse, community mental health nurse (CMHN)**

Level description:

This level requires consolidation of registrant standards of proficiency and developing confidence to work both within a multidisciplinary team and alone without direct supervision, undertaking and reporting on autonomous decisions within scope of practice. It is expected that all newly registered staff will have a period of preceptorship. This level requires a developing knowledge of mental health nursing in the broadest sense, including physical health skills and related physical health conditions. This level of mental health nursing requires excellent interpersonal and values-based communication skills to support individuals with a wide range of mental health conditions, within a wide range of settings and areas of practice.

Mental health nurses must practice in a way that focuses on the therapeutic use of self and draw on a range of evidence-based psychological, psychosocial skills and interventions to engage with the individual and develop and maintain therapeutic relationships. They need to work alongside individuals, using a range of interpersonal approaches and skills to help the individual explore and

make sense of their experiences in a way that promotes recovery, mental health and wellbeing.

Acting professionally at all times in the best interests of individuals, the mental health nurse provides person-centered, safe and compassionate care, using their knowledge and experience to make evidence-based decisions. Alongside this, mental health nurses also need to be aware of their own physical and mental health and wellbeing and the impact this can have on their practice. The mental health nurse should use therapeutic principles to engage, maintain and, where appropriate, disengage from professional caring relationships, respecting professional boundaries.

Practice at this level requires resilience and the ability to be flexible and adaptable. Working as part of a mental health nursing and multidisciplinary team, they will have some responsibility for supervising less experienced or qualified staff and students in practice placements, and move towards taking responsibility for, and ownership of, their own development needs. They will be expected to actively contribute to quality assurance processes and service development. This requires awareness and understanding of working within a wider health and social care system and the relation to related legal frameworks.

All work is undertaken demonstrating positive attitudes, values and behaviours, including problem solving with honesty, integrity, care and compassion. The registered mental health nurse needs to present a positive image of mental health nursing, and recognise and reflect on their own good efforts, valuing the contributions and diversity of others.

Level 5 core competencies

CORE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS (set out to meet the four pillars)

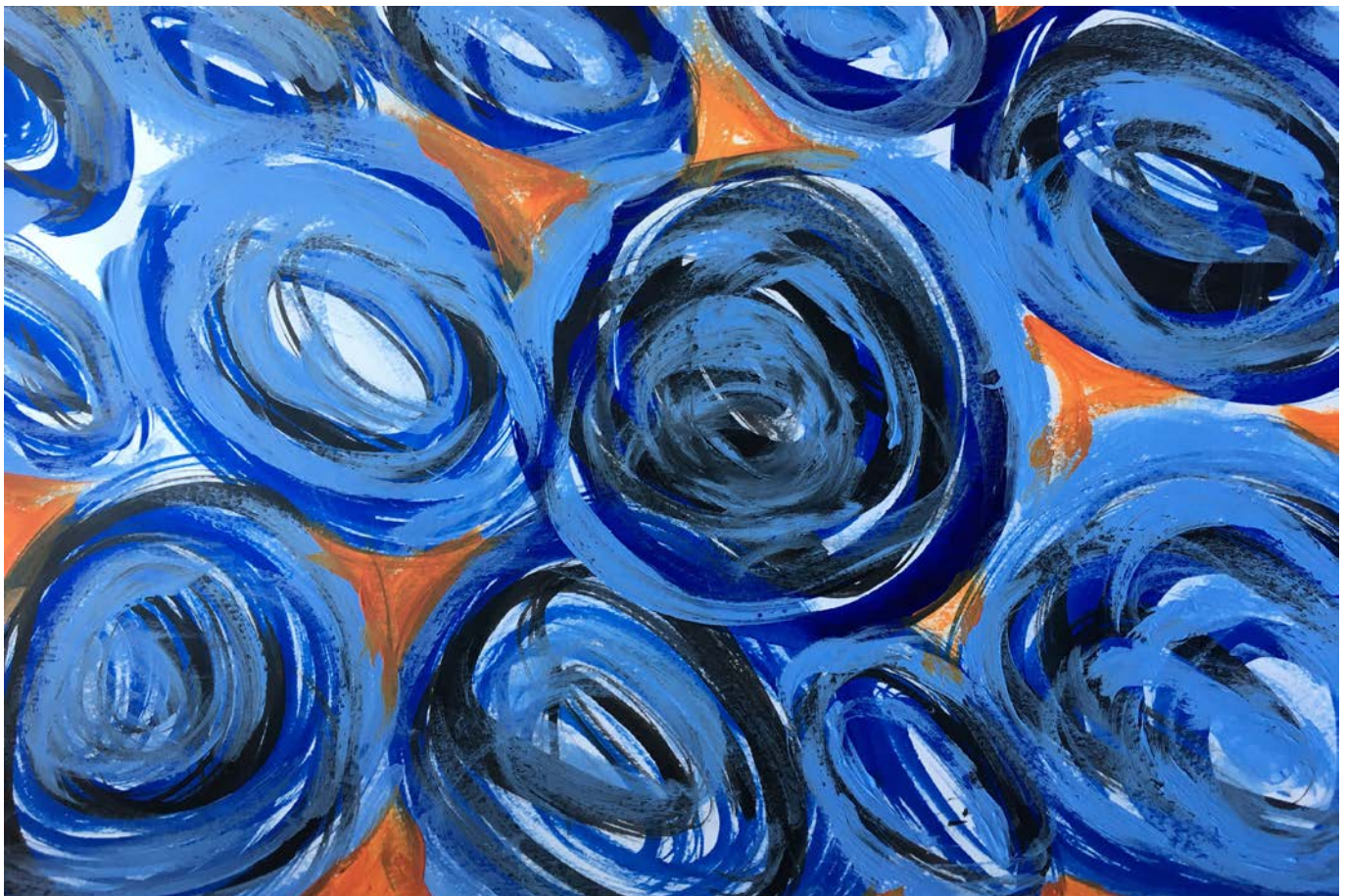
Clinical practice

The mental health nurse should demonstrate developing competence in mental health nursing knowledge and skills in the comprehensive and systematic assessment and care of patients in secondary, community and general practice settings. They must ensure that all information is clearly, accurately and objectively recorded as required by local policies, and they are responsible and accountable for ongoing planning, implementation and evaluation, and in a confidential way. They should work both independently and as part of a team to:

- Ensure care is values-based, non-judgemental and equitable, and supports the principles of equality, diversity and inclusivity being met.
- Be able to listen to, understand and communicate complex information, using effective questioning techniques to elicit a range of views.
- Effectively engage with individuals – staff and people who use services, their families and carers – in a way that uses personal qualities, experiences and interpersonal skills to develop and maintain therapeutic, recovery-focused relationships.
- Be able to assess individuals, taking into account their physical, mental and social states, alongside the impact of their environment and social support available to them, and the co-production of care plans that are person-centred and focused on self-care, with clear objectives.
- Utilise physical and mental health clinical examination skills, encompassing all aspects of the patient's needs.
- Use a range of assessment approaches pertinent to the individual's needs to inform the assessment and management of risk for individuals, staff and the general public, within ethical and legal frameworks.
- Coordinate and help people navigate through pathways of care towards their recovery using evidence-informed, person-centred and negotiated care across the age spectrum.
- Be able to manage a delegated caseload to help deliver safe, effective, rights-based, and person-centred care and interventions in the delivery of mental health nursing support, meeting the holistic needs of individuals with mental health problems, their families and carers.
- Be able to practice in a way that is open and transparent, exercising a professional duty of candour in circumstances where things have gone wrong and/or harm has occurred.
- Place a strong emphasis on supporting patient self-care and management, and negotiated, tailored health promotion and evidence-informed behaviour change strategies.
- Be able to signpost patients and carers to appropriate resources for their needs, supporting and developing this approach in other staff.
- Build partnerships and therapeutic relationships using sensitivity and a range of effective, safe, compassionate, values-based communication techniques and interpersonal approaches that are person-centred, respectful and non-discriminatory, and also enable psychosocial education, self-management and problem solving.
- Know how to provide support and therapeutic intervention for individuals and families during crisis, relapse and periods of mental distress throughout the period of care.
- Identify social and economic factors that may impact on health, mental health and wellbeing, and be able to support individuals to address these.
- Understand the presentations of complex needs, local care pathways and evidence-based management experienced by patients in secondary, community, specialist and general practice settings and presenting mental health conditions.
- Be able to use a range of evidence-based psychological, psychosocial and other complex therapeutic skills, interventions and values-based mental health frameworks to promote positive recovery-focused relationships, social inclusion and human rights, to provide person-centred support and care across all ages.
- Develop confidence in applying ethical principles in clinical decision making.
- Have knowledge of the structure and functions of the human body and an understanding of the broad range of common physical health conditions, including comorbidity with mental health conditions.
- Develop an in-depth understanding of the ways

mental health legislation, frameworks, policy and related liberty protection safeguards support safe and effective mental health nursing.

- Ensure an understanding of the implications, professional responsibility and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) requirements of medicine management and their impact on the individual's physical and mental health, promoting medicines optimisation in practice.
- Identify risk and be able to recognise the dynamic nature of risk to self and others and formulate strategy for risk management.
- Recognise the improvement of patient safety by developing systems that disseminate learning from incidents to ensure best practice is embedded.
- Be able to assess, formulate, mitigate and manage and identify risk and communicate this to individuals and others.
- Be able to discuss, identify and escalate safeguarding issues in a sensitive way to protect those who are vulnerable.
- Ensure information is recorded objectively and reported back to the wider multidisciplinary and multi-agency team as required, meeting regulatory and policy requirements.
- Be able to plan ahead for potential scenarios to ensure care needs are understood and met.
- Demonstrate problem-solving skills, using a wide range of knowledge, theories and principles.
- Recognise signs of deterioration of physical health in individuals using evidence-based tools, and ensure escalation protocols are followed to ensure patient safety in line with professional responsibilities.
- Recognise the signs of deterioration of mental health based on known relapse signs, working collaboratively with the individual's expressed wishes, and ensure escalation is recorded and shared with the multidisciplinary team.
- Collaborate effectively with other members of the mental health nursing and multidisciplinary team and other agencies involved in the individual's care.



- Be able to recognise the individual's health beliefs and promote self-management where possible to assist patients to make choices about their healthcare needs.
- Be flexible and responsive in meeting changing needs, demands and priorities while maintaining a compassionate and caring service provision.
- Work in partnership with patients with a wide range of mental and physical health conditions.
- Utilise a range of IT applications and technology where appropriate.

Facilitation of learning

Mental health nurses should be able to recognise and reflect on their own personal development needs and be responsible and accountable for keeping their own knowledge and skills up to date through continuing professional development. This will include supporting individuals and their families, carers, other staff and students.

- Understand and engage with the requirements of the NMC revalidation process, both for self and others.
- Learn continuously, taking responsibility for own learning, reflecting on own practice, setting learning goals and working towards their achievement, and encouraging others to develop their practice.
- Identify, access and make use of relevant learning resources and opportunities.
- Be able to reflect on own practice and utilise clinical supervision and other development opportunities to enhance practice.
- Understand emotional intelligence and the ability to support staff to debrief and reflect on difficult situations experienced to improve learning and enhance self-awareness.
- Engage with appraisal and the development and activation of a personal development plan.
- Provide effective supervision and assessment for appropriate learners and contribute to the maintenance of a supportive learning environment with a range of learning opportunities.
- Be creative in developing appropriate learning methods and resources for individuals and adapting care to support individual needs as required.
- Understand and engage in the audit process and its relevance to safety and effective care.

Leadership

A registered mental health nurse has accountability and responsibility within their scope of practice. Registered mental health nurses provide leadership by acting as role models for best practice in the delivery of nursing care and are responsible for the appropriate delegation and supervision of the delivery of care.

- Demonstrate clinical leadership behaviours and skills.
- Understand the principles of effective leadership, management, and group and organisational dynamics and culture, applying these to teamworking and decision making.
- Display confidence to clinically lead and supervise the delivery of care, including overseeing the clinical work of the Level 4 nursing associates (on completion of preceptorship) and support staff as delegated.
- Be able to prioritise a delegated caseload/workload to facilitate the delivery of safe, effective, rights-based and person-centred interventions as appropriate, and manage time and work effectively within the team and across appropriate integrated care systems.
- Know about, and apply, resource management to ensure care is safe and clinically effective, ensuring principles of confidentiality and disclosure are maintained.
- Recognise and apply personal and professional accountability and responsibility to monitor and evaluate care to ensure safe and effective practice.
- Identify opportunities to suggest improvements to services or the introduction of other innovations or evidence.
- Engage actively in data collection for quality assurance and continuous improvement, taking responsibility for ongoing evaluation of delegated care.
- Participate in personal development, appraisal and development of other team members and linked to organisational and team goals.
- Be able to recognise poor performance and take appropriate, timely measures.
- Be able to act on own initiative and work autonomously within sphere of practice, working effectively as part of a multidisciplinary team reviewing the individual's needs.

- Contribute to reviewing individual needs, assessments or other data in the mental health setting that reflect the demographics and case management and the broader public mental health issues within the local community, as part of a multidisciplinary team.
- Collaborate effectively with a range of other healthcare professionals and agencies that may be involved in the individual's interdependent care, ensuring awareness of their scope of practice, roles and responsibilities to ensure correct referral and ongoing relationships.
- Continue to develop skills in negotiation, influencing, organisation, problem solving, respectful challenge, critical appraisal and resource management.
- Continue to develop and consolidate critical thinking, analytical, evaluation and interpersonal skills.
- Work collaboratively with others to meet local mental health needs for individuals, groups and the wider community.

Research, evidence and development

A mental health nurse should demonstrate professional curiosity to practice, ensuring best quality care is offered within any constraints of the service. They should have an appreciation of how the mental health nurse makes a key contribution to the continuous monitoring and quality of improving care and treatment to enhance health outcomes.

- Be able to articulate the evidence underpinning individuals' care plans and interventions.
- Be able to appreciate the value of evidence in practice, be able to understand and appraise research, apply relevant theory and research findings to work, and identify areas for further investigation.
- Be able to source, understand and engage evidence, and to appraise it to underpin practice.
- Contribute to the development of local guidelines and policy locally, regionally and nationally, where appropriate.
- Recognise any ethical implications of audit, research, clinical trial or service user involvement strategies.

Education – indicative minimum professional/ educational and training requirements

- First degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent experience;
- Registered on Part 1 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register*;
- Undertake a period of preceptorship of, on average, 6–12 months;
- Level 3 safeguarding training: adults and children; and
- Mental health legislation, including the Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), and Care Act.

Undertake training in:

- Clinical supervision;
- Trauma-informed care risk formulation;
- Reducing restrictive practice – core;
- Collaborative care planning and risk management;
- Mental state examination.

* Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018). Future nurse: Standards of proficiency for registered nurses

Level 6

Overview

Working at this level requires a critical understanding of detailed theoretical and practical knowledge, can be specialist and/or have management and leadership responsibilities. Mental health nurses at this level should demonstrate initiative and creativity in finding solutions to problems. They need to have some responsibility for team performance and service development, and consistently undertake self-development.

Example reference title: **senior mental health nurse, deputy ward manager**

Level description

This is a pivotal level in the mental health nursing career and is the first promotional nursing level the registered mental health nurse will undertake. It is also where new opportunities are developing, and this level underpins future career choices in mental health nursing.

Working at this level requires mental health nurses to actively promote values-based practice when working with others to ensure rights-based and recovery-focused approaches to support and intervention. They will also demonstrate a high level of awareness of their own beliefs and values, and how they may influence practice and the practice of others.

In addition to the level 5 requirements, this level of practice requires consolidation of specialist knowledge and skills in mental health nursing practice, demonstrating a depth of knowledge, understanding and competence that supports evidenced, informed, complex, autonomous and independent decision making and care in a range of settings that are often complex and unpredictable. It also requires a recognition that physical health nursing continues to be a core competency at this level.

Working at this level will require personal resilience, management and mental health clinical leadership, with the support and development of mental health nursing team members. There is also some responsibility for

team performance and providing an effective learning environment for staff and students in the wider team.

This level involves more of a focus on support and development, coaching and leadership, and not just managing more junior staff. The level will require an innovative approach to supporting and developing new models and strategies, usually incorporating multi-professional and inter-agency approaches to monitor and improve care.

This level requires the ability to work independently, autonomously and collaboratively, using freedom to exercise judgement about actions, while accepting professional accountability and responsibility. This level also requires enhanced critical thinking and the ability to critically analyse a broad range of policies, literature and evidence to support mental health clinical practice.

Level 6 core competencies

CORE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS (set out to meet the four pillars)

Clinical practice

In addition to requirements at level 5, level 6 staff require the following competences:

- Assess the root cause of problems in complex and unpredictable environments.
- Assess capacity for informed consent in complex situations, and support and guide other staff to develop this skill.
- Be creative and innovative in implementing solutions, maintaining honesty, integrity and transparency.
- Undertake complex assessments using a variety of assessment tools and consultation models appropriate to the situation.
- Continue to develop knowledge and skills in specific physical healthcare interventions and procedures (including invasive procedures) that reflect the needs of the individual.

- Use advanced communication, influencing and negotiation skills that encompass the ability to respond appropriately to individuals in heightened emotional states and in challenging situations, seeking support as required.
- Demonstrate teamwork across different groups, with the ability to work independently and to accept professional accountability and responsibility, supporting and developing others in the nursing team to collaborate effectively.
- Deliver and evaluate a range of person-centred therapeutic biopsychosocial interventions and recovery skills, gaining engagement of the individual and the therapeutic relationship to give hope and promote recovery.
- Support the ongoing development of care pathways, aiming for delivery of care in the least restrictive setting to manage safety and achieving preferred place of care for the individual.
- Ensure learning from incidents is embedded to improve patient safety by developing systems that disseminate best practice.
- Advocate the use of technology to support independence, improve self-care and prevent deterioration.

Facilitation of learning

In addition to level 5, level 6 staff require the following competences:

- Understand and engage with the requirements of the NMC revalidation process for self and for others.
- Contribute to a variety of professional networks, sharing learning from these and the ability to offer a professional voice.
- Contribute to evidence-based learning with clinical expertise.
- Support effective team systems for ongoing supervision, support and development, including preceptorship programmes, promoting informal and formal peer support, and the identification of any performance issues.
- Identify and support the learning needs of individuals and the team in response to personal development needs identified at appraisal or service need.



- Develop a positive learning environment for students and the staff team, giving and receiving feedback in an open, honest and constructive manner, and evaluate the impact of educational interventions.
- Contribute to developing a learning culture within the immediate team to improve individual safety, ensuring staff are supported and can learn from, and in future prevent, untoward incidents.

Leadership

In addition to level 5, level 6 staff require the following competences:

- Participate in a multidisciplinary team effectively, with delegated responsibility for resource management.
- Lead, persuade and influence others.
- Demonstrate clinical leadership of the team, including robust preceptorship of new staff, and clarity of expectation of team members with respect to quality of care delivery and values.
- Demonstrate emotional intelligence to recognise pressures on staff and the development of mechanisms to support and develop staff to acknowledge the impact of caring for individuals.
- Demonstrate enhanced knowledge of the service needs and resources available to work collaboratively.
- Build strong relationships with other multidisciplinary teams and agencies, including the voluntary sector, particularly for individuals receiving shared care to ensure an effective flow of individuals' information.
- Have advanced knowledge of capacity and demand issues on safer staffing and the need to ensure this is in place.
- Prioritise tasks within the team to manage the caseload/workload effectively.
- Coordinate, delegate to and supervise team members in delivering holistic care.
- Take delegated responsibility, where appropriate, for the management of a budget that may include purchasing assets, equipment or other resources, and staff costs.
- Be aware of and apply appropriate legislation that informs mental health nursing and healthcare delivery and improves individuals' outcomes.

Research, evidence and development

In addition to level 5 requirements, level 6 staff require the following competences:

- Demonstrate underpinning knowledge of contemporary mental health nursing practice, and the application and integration of research and other evidence into practice.
- Critically appraise information.
- Lead on research-related activity such as audit, including environmental audit, data gathering and patient feedback.

Education – indicative minimum professional/educational and training requirements

- First degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent experience;
- Registered on Part 1 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register; and
- Level 3 safeguarding training: adults and children.

May work towards:

- a recognised leadership qualification and/or
- postgraduate level study.

Level 7

Overview

Working at this level requires a critical awareness of knowledge issues in practice between different roles and professions. It requires innovation and responsibility for developing and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment.

Example reference title: **advanced clinical practitioner**

Level description

This level of practice requires a high level of skill, with experience of supervising complex clinical mental health practice, and continues to develop this expertise in a consultative capacity, advising others on evidence-informed, complex mental health nursing issues. There may well be responsibility for a caseload, the size dependent on the mental health nurse's responsibilities for intervention, and an expectation to provide training, support and supervision to staff.

Working at this level requires mental health clinical expertise with leadership skills.

In addition to level 6 requirements, key responsibilities at level 7 are to consolidate skills of critical analysis and evaluation to enable knowledge related to complex, contemporary mental health nursing practice to be critiqued. Practice at this level requires staff to use contemporary knowledge in supportive and innovative ways, and take responsibility for developing and changing practice in complex and sometimes unpredictable environments.

Practice at this level must recognise the complexity of operating across multi-agency environments and the need for collaborative decision making, and for support staff to feel confident and competent in moving across agency and professional boundaries.

Mental health nurses can also work at this level of practice in areas with a focus on management/leadership, education and research, for example, managing a service or working in a clinical academic post.

When considering development of advanced level practice, reference should be made to the HEE Advanced Practice Mental Health Curriculum and Capabilities Framework, published in September 2020

Level 7 core competencies

CORE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS (set out to meet the four pillars)

Clinical practice

Mental health nurses at this level need to undertake advanced complex mental health nursing interventions for a wide range of mental health needs for their own scope of practice and a heightened awareness of the roles of others. They should apply critical analysis and interpretation across a wide range of clinical scenarios. This will entail demonstrating not only practical knowledge, but a critical understanding of the range of theories, principles, interventions and legal frameworks that underpin the mental health nursing approach. They should supervise other staff to enhance their practice to manage future situations.

In addition to the requirements at levels 5 and 6, level 7 staff require the following competences:

- Assimilate and communicate complex information from a range of sources, exploring effective questioning techniques, collecting information and comparing a range of options to elicit a range of views.
- Hold, debate and manage clinical uncertainty in themselves and others.
- Use critical analysis and interpretation of clinical scenarios, and apply holistically to formulate, assess, diagnose, plan, review and lead the clinical discussion in therapeutic interventions, using a best practice, values-based approach and understanding parity of esteem.
- Lead decision making in complex situations regarding confidentiality and sharing information.

- Build capacity and capability to ensure the delivery of a range of evidence-based biopsychosocial therapeutic skills and interventions to respond to population needs.
- Understand accountability and responsibility for the service, or elements of service delivery, and lead on clinical governance.
- Critically challenge practice, systems and policies.

Facilitation of learning

In addition to the requirements of levels 5 and 6, level 7 staff require the following competences:

- Demonstrate reflection of outcomes on own practice (personal and professional), and the impact of that on others to reflect on their own practice.
- Foster a learning environment that supports the delivery of high quality, restorative supervision and resilience.
- Be an experienced work-based learning educator/assessor, providing advice and support to other practitioners.
- Develop, deliver and evaluate training and education packages for individuals and groups, across a broad range of mental health nursing needs and in collaboration with other disciplines and agencies to facilitate multi-professional/agency learning.
- Build capacity and capability to support learning in practice settings and collaborate with education service providers and education commissioners to ensure workforce and student needs are met.

Leadership

In addition to those of levels 5 and 6, level 7 staff require the following competences:

- Be an identified leadership role model, leading quality improvement and the facilitation of co-production.
- Take a lead in ensuring the critical application of standards and guidelines.
- Lead, support, value, motivate and challenge others to deliver positive outcomes.
- Lead on collaborative work with others to meet local mental health needs for individuals, groups and the wider community.

- Undertake systematic investigations and/or reviews and write comprehensive reports.
- Demonstrate responsibility for appropriate resource management and evaluate the effectiveness of the resources available.
- Lead collaboration across a wide system of professionals and agencies, fostering collaboration and co-production to meet the needs of the population they serve.

Research, evidence and development

In addition to the requirements of levels 5 and 6, level 7 staff require the following competences:

- Create an environment that enables and encourages active research, using contemporary evidence and approaches.
- Influence operational and strategic level thinking, ensuring this translates into practice and improves the quality of care.
- Critically appraise and optimise digital technology to enable, foster and create an environment of innovation.
- Lead and contribute to mental healthcare using quality improvement approaches, and support the development of the safe implementation of new policies, protocols, standard operating procedures and guidelines for practice.
- Foster an environment where new skills are developed in response to emerging mental health knowledge, techniques and interventions.

Education – indicative minimum professional/educational requirements

- First degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent experience;
- Registered on Part 1 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register; and
- Evidence of applicable postgraduate Master's level study or equivalent, for example:
 - MSc in advanced clinical nursing;
 - advanced nursing practice; and/or
 - specific modules relevant to area of practice.

Level 8

Overview

Working at this level requires highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work, which can be used as the basis for original thinking and/or research. It requires leadership with considerable responsibility, and the ability to research and analyse complex processes. This level has responsibility for service improvement or development and may also have considerable clinical and/or management responsibilities, be accountable for service delivery or have a leading education or commissioning role.

Example reference title: **consultant nurse, responsible clinician, clinical lead**

Level description

In addition to level 7 requirements, this level of practice requires the demonstration of highly specialised knowledge in mental health nursing. It is likely to entail key responsibilities with respect to research, advanced mental health nursing practice, service development and improvement and education. At this level, mental health nurses are usually working at the forefront of developments in their field, undertaking original research or having responsibility for coordination and delivery of research and development in their organisation and the implementation of research and evidence into practice.

This level of practice requires expertise in leadership skills. Working at this level of practice, mental health nurses can continue to have clinical patient contact at a consultant level of practice and a requirement to provide training, support and supervision to staff.

Level 8 requires the highest level of expertise (usually) in one particular clinical specialty within mental health, and the expectation to clinically lead and influence for the highest standards in practice.

Working at level 8 also requires the ability to look beyond an individual field of practice, be able to interface between conditions and to build trusted relationships, for example, with physical healthcare colleagues.

There are many opportunities to work in different specialist areas, develop expert knowledge and use consultancy expertise in an area of specialism in mental health.

Level 8 core competencies

CORE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS (set out to meet the four pillars)

Clinical practice

At this level the mental health nurse works clinically, acting in a consultancy capacity for complex mental health nursing interventions. This may be in a broad range of mental health interventions or, at this level, may be specialised in a key area of mental health nursing. This will entail being able to demonstrate not only practical knowledge but a critical understanding of the range of theories and principles that underpin the mental health therapeutic approach and the ability to use advanced assessment, diagnostic reasoning skills, national legal frameworks and a range of other diagnostic support methods.

In addition to the requirements at levels 5, 6 and 7, level 8 staff require the following competences:

- Challenge practice, systems and policies in an objective and constructive manner.
- Proactively develop opportunities to influence national and local policy and strategy.
- Critically analyse evidence, cases and situations in clinical practice to enable a high level of judgement and decision making.
- Promote rights- and values-based practice to support recovery and social inclusion.
- Lead on displaying originality of thought and use this in innovative service development and in the delivery and safe implementation of new policies and guidelines for practice.

Facilitation of learning

In addition to levels 5, 6 and 7, level 8 staff require the following competences:

- Demonstrate problem-solving skills underpinned from perspectives, for example, in research processes, service and quality improvement techniques, educational theory or leadership and management theory.
- Lead on the development and implementation of research projects related to mental health nursing, building effective working relationships between practice and higher education institutions.
- Lead proactive collaboration with public health agencies and local authorities to ensure mental health is actively engaged in the health improvement strategies for the local community.
- Build capacity and capability to support learning in practice settings and collaborate with education service providers and education commissioners to ensure workforce and student needs are met.
- Create opportunities for motivating others to learn and develop their teaching and assessment skills across the organisation.
- Influence organisational structures and culture to ensure delivery of continuous education and training for supervisors and assessors.
- Lead planning, implementation and evaluation of educational interventions at a local and national level for individuals, their family and carers, a range of staff and the wider service, informed by training needs analysis and in response to policy and strategy.
- Develop, deliver and evaluate training and education packages for the individual and groups, across a broad range of mental health needs and in collaboration with other disciplines and agencies to facilitate multi-professional/agency learning.
- Promote motivational ways to influence and optimise learning.
- Develop other staff to enhance their practice to manage future situations.

Leadership

The management role of a level 8 practitioner will vary according to the employer's expectations of the role.

In addition to the requirements of levels 5, 6 and 7, level 8 staff require the following competences:

- Promote an environment that supports constructive challenge of the status quo.
- Assimilate information from a range of sources to ensure complex decisions reflect the analysis of several different perspectives.
- Champion and be a role model for values- and rights-based care.
- Lead the development of strategy and ensure collaborative working with others to advocate practice development to improve the quality of care and the professionalism of others, upholding the profession in the face of adversity.
- Lead on the sustainability of service.
- Represent mental health nursing in local, regional and national political, strategic or policy fora.
- Create an environment for successful change and practice development.
- Lead on demonstrating an evaluative and outcomes-based approach to practice and develop strategies to share this with a wider audience.
- Lead on key aspects of quality assurance to develop robust outcome indicators for mental health nursing and other aspects of clinical governance.
- Lead on/complete systematic investigations and write objective reports following the completion of the investigation, and informing next steps.
- Lead collaboration across a wide system of professionals and agencies, fostering collaboration and co-production to develop multi-professional/inter-agency strategies.
- Champion and advocate individuals' voices to ensure practice provides optimal experience, as well as outcomes.

Research, evidence and development

In addition to requirements at levels 5, 6 and 7, level 8 staff require the following competences:

- Lead at least one specialist area of expertise, to be seen as a local expert able to articulate the most contemporary evidence and approaches to practice and management.

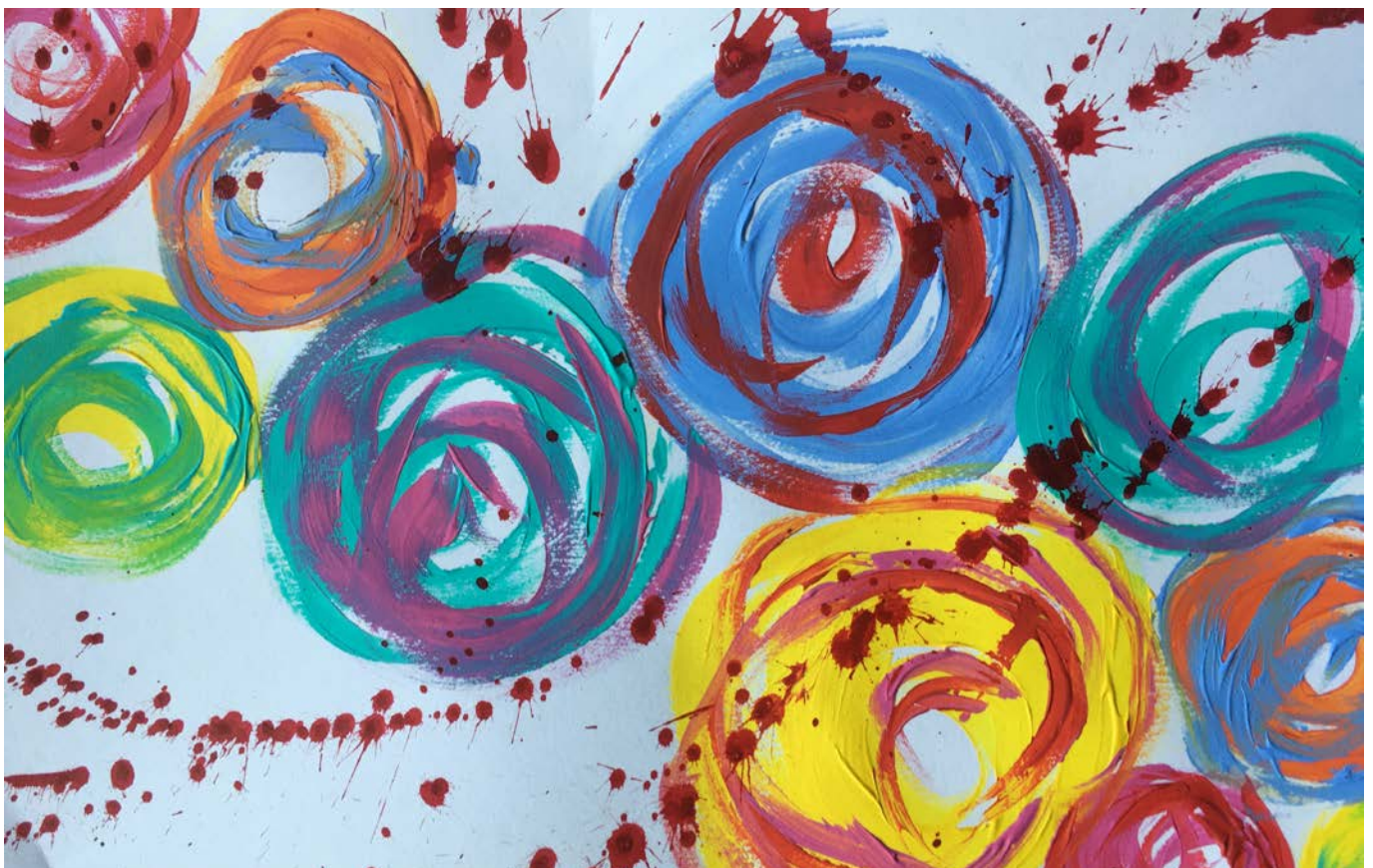
- Be involved with the review and monitoring of mental health clinical policies to ensure they are based on contemporary evidence.
- Be involved in mental health clinical policy, and research communities to identify deficits in evidence and identification of potential funding sources for practice or research development.
- Lead on the development of implementation of research and development strategies.
- Collaborate with local research partners and universities to understand new projects, developments and findings, and to ensure frameworks for research governance are applied appropriately.
- Lead research as a principal investigator, where appropriate.
- Support the development of staff in research and practice development activities.
- Present research findings in a variety of media, which can include peer-reviewed journals, conferences and at other dissemination events, or via electronic mechanisms.
- Ensure others recognise the importance of data collection and quality assurance and ensure that findings and other results are disseminated in meaningful ways to staff.
- Critically analyse and synthesise evidence-based practice on research into the application of practice.
- Analyse and distil national policy to understand the impact on service provision and at system level.

Education – indicative minimum professional/educational and training requirements

- First degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent experience;
- Registered on Part 1 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register; and
- Master's degree in mental health nursing.

May work towards:

- professional doctorate (clinical practice);
- PhD (research); and/or
- educational doctorate (education).



Level 9

Overview

Working at level 9 requires knowledge at the most advanced frontier of the field of mental health and at the interface between fields and in leadership. There is usually a responsibility for the development and delivery of a mental health service at the highest level of the organisation and across the system.

Example reference title: **executive director of mental health nursing**

Level description

In addition to level 8 requirements, level 9 requires the highest level of working, is well connected nationally and will steer the development of the mental health nursing profession across the system. This level of working requires considerable previous experience, which can include working in a range of mental health/health settings. This level will uphold the highest standards for the mental health nursing profession. This level has the power to act, authorise and influence.

This level has responsibility for service improvement or development and may also have considerable clinical and/or management responsibilities, be accountable for service delivery or have a leading education or commissioning role, which can be across a health system.

This level of practice may hold statutory, organisational and system-wide accountability for areas of responsibility, such as corporate and clinical governance, operational and workforce planning, safeguarding, emergency planning, infection prevention and control, and health and safety.

Level 9 requires working collaboratively and building relationships across organisational boundaries and systems, leading on the development, implementation and awareness-raising of relevant policies, guidelines and strategies.

There is an increasing recognition of the highest level of clinical expertise that mental health nurses can bring

to working at this level, locally, regionally and nationally across the system, and resulting enhanced career opportunities.

Level 9 core competencies

CORE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS (set out to meet the four pillars)

Clinical practice

In addition to the requirements at levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, level 9 staff require the following competences:

- Lead on professional and clinical leadership to improve and optimise safety.
- Exercise the highest level of personal autonomy.
- Drive change across the system in response to emerging knowledge and techniques, both for practice within the system and national policy and practice.
- Demonstrate exceptional skills and advanced levels of clinical judgement, knowledge and expertise, underpinning and promoting the delivery of clinical governance, delivery of expert clinical care and professional standards.
- Ensure the organisational, ethical and moral dimensions of practice are adhered to.
- Lead the enhancement of quality in service delivery.
- Take the lead for the organisational and system adherence to the application of standards, guidelines, and professional and legal frameworks, while remaining accountable for own practice.
- Utilise expert knowledge of clinical governance, legal and ethical issues, and professional codes of conduct to make complex decisions.

Facilitation of learning

In addition to the requirements at levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, level 9 staff require the following competences:

- Provide strategic influence and guidance to support organisational and system learning.

- Contribute to the setting of system goals that are reflected in own, others', local, regional and national objectives.
- Lead strategically to create and facilitate an ethos that values a positive learning environment and promotes a learning culture.
- Develop, manage and update strategic and operational plans for the system, using the principles of management theory and management skills, agreeing objectives with relevant individuals.

Leadership

In addition to the requirements at levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, level 9 staff require the following competence:

- Provide inspirational, senior executive-level leadership at the highest level and across the system.
- Take responsibility and be accountable for the direct delivery of a mental health nursing service, assessing, minimising risks to, and optimising, safety.
- Develop a system and organisational culture that encourages openness, compassion and psychological safety.
- Lead on the development, implementation and awareness-raising of relevant policies, guidelines and strategies.
- Identify and act on opportunities to influence mental health nursing policy, strategy and guidelines across the system, both regionally and nationally.
- Instigate and manage change within complex environments.
- Demonstrate innovation in solving issues involving many interacting factors.
- Drive multi-agency, system-wide collaborative working, using appropriate protocols to enable effective cross-organisational benefits for staff and individuals.
- Maximise the potential of the service through the use of recognised workforce planning methodologies, skill mix and co-production.
- Lead, manage and evaluate change across the system, challenging stigma and championing parity of esteem.
- Have the ability to look beyond the organisation

and be able to interface across the system and build trusted relationships, for example, with physical healthcare colleagues.

Research, evidence and development

In addition to the requirements at levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, level 9 staff require the following competences:

- Lead on the clinical review of clinical effectiveness of system-wide services and care pathways.
- Review the strategic and operational impact/outcome of the service, system-wide, evaluating the impact on quality, return on investment and national policies.
- Critically analyse and evaluate a range of texts and write effectively for a range of contexts and situations, and for a wide array of audiences.
- Lead on national and system-wide research.
- Be able to synthesise and transfer complex research from other fields to mental health nursing.

Education – indicative minimum professional/educational and training requirements

- First degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent experience;
- Registered on Part 1 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register;
- Master's degree in mental health nursing, or equivalent; and
- Senior leadership training.

May hold or work towards:

- professional doctorate (clinical practice);
- PhD (research);
- educational doctorate (education); or
- postdoctoral academic studies.

Appendix 1. The Career Framework for Health

Key elements

9

Level 9

People working at level 9 require knowledge at the most advanced frontier of the field of work and at the interface between fields. They will have responsibility for the development and delivery of a service to a population, at the highest level of the organisation.

Indicative or reference title: director

8

Level 8

People at level 8 of the health career framework require highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work, which they use as the basis for original thinking and/or research. They are leaders with considerable responsibility, and the ability to research and analyse complex processes. They have responsibility for service improvement or development. They may have considerable clinical and/or management responsibilities, be accountable for service delivery or have a leading education or commissioning role. **Indicative or reference title: consultant**

7

Level 7

People at level 7 of the health career framework have a critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields. They are innovative, and have a responsibility for developing and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment. **Indicative or reference title: advanced practitioner**

6

Level 6

People at level 6 require a critical understanding of detailed theoretical and practical knowledge, are specialist and/or have management and leadership responsibilities. They demonstrate initiative and are creative in finding solutions to problems. They have some responsibility for team performance and service development and they consistently undertake self-development. **Indicative or reference title: specialist/senior practitioner**

5

Level 5

People at level 5 will have a comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge. They are able to use knowledge to solve problems creatively, make judgements which require analysis and interpretation, and actively contribute to service and self-development. They may have responsibility for supervision of staff or training. **Indicative or reference title: practitioner**

4

Level 4

People at level 4 require factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work. Work is guided by standard operating procedures, protocols or systems of work, but the worker makes judgements, plans activities, contributes to service development and demonstrates self-development. They may have responsibility for supervision of some staff.

Indicative or reference title: assistant/associate practitioner

3

Level 3

People at level 3 require knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work. They may carry out a wider range of duties than the person working at level 2, and will have more responsibility, with guidance and supervision available when needed. They will contribute to service development, and are responsible for self-development.

Indicative or reference title: senior healthcare assistant/technician

2

Level 2

People at level 2 require basic factual knowledge of a field of work. They may carry out clinical, technical, scientific or administrative duties according to established protocols or procedures, or systems of work. **Indicative or reference title: support worker**

1

Level 1

People at level 1 are at entry level, and require basic general knowledge. They undertake a limited number of straightforward tasks under direct supervision. They could be any new starter to work in the health sector, and progress rapidly to level 2.

Indicative or reference title: cadet

The diagram outlines the health career framework levels – its key elements, the appropriate career framework level title, and some indicative role titles.

Structure of the Framework

The Framework consists of nine different levels, from level 1 (initial entry level jobs) to the most senior staff at level 9. Each level has characteristics and attributes ascribed to it that describe, for example, the amount of responsibility, complexity of thinking and level of decision making required.

Using the health career framework enables individuals to identify the components (functional areas) of a job and the level at which these need to be undertaken. The functional areas are:

- knowledge, skills, training and experience;
- supervision;
- professional and vocational competence;
- analytical/clinical skills and patient care;
- organisational skills and autonomy/freedom to act;
- planning, policy and service development;
- financial, administration, physical and human; resources; and
- research and development.

The Framework provides a common language and currency to support career development by offering:

- **consistency** – in a structure that is easy to understand and follow, and describes nine career levels at which each functional area of a role can be performed, from initial level 1 entry level to consultant practitioners and more senior staff at level 9;
- **progression** – in providing individuals with a means to articulate their achievements and identify options available to develop their core knowledge and skills and progress their careers, both vertically and horizontally within the same and/or into the next career level; and
- **flexibility** – in balancing overarching elements required to ensure national consistency with maximum flexibility for health organisations. This allows the identification of transferable roles and thereby maximises workforce flexibility, clinical governance and career progression, and so is not just NHS-focused.



Appendix 2. How the Framework was developed

Development of the Framework was steered by an expert reference group, with additional membership to represent key stakeholder organisations across the mental health sector.

Three stakeholder events were held to seek views from stakeholders across the mental health nursing profession. A wider stakeholder list was also established to include a more diverse range of organisations and individuals that wished to be updated on development of the Framework, and to provide comments or feedback as part of the consultation process.

Initial desk research was undertaken to identify key references, resources and significant themes or issues for consideration – further references and resources continued to be identified during the project (see Appendix 3. Bibliography).

The development of the Framework has been an iterative process. Initial iterations of the Framework were developed based on the findings of the desk research and consultation, with comments received following the electronic circulation of drafts from the expert reference group and the stakeholder events informing the final draft Framework document agreed in March 2020.

Appendix 3. Bibliography

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