



STANDARDISED NURSING TERMINOLOGY: Enabling comprehensive nursing data and analysis

Florence Nightingale studied data to identify ways to improve nursing care. One hundred and forty years later, Clarke and Lang (1992) expanded on this when they observed that nurses must classify what we do, in order to capture what we do. They stated:

“If you can’t name it, you can’t control it, finance it, research it, teach it, or put it into public policy.”

The adoption of Standardised Nursing Terminology (SNT) poses a solution to this issue, especially in the advent of digitalisation of health records. SNT enables comprehensive nursing data collection and analysis. The World Health Organization (2006) defines standardised terminology as “a compilation of terms used in the clinical assessment, management, and care of patients, which includes agreed definitions that adequately represent the knowledge behind these terms and link with a standardised coding and classification system.”

KEY STATEMENT

ACN advocates for SNT systems that enable nursing’s contribution to health care to be more visible, to generate new insights, leading to best practice and increase the body of nursing knowledge (Björvell et al., 2023).

BACKGROUND

Australia has increasingly implemented clinical information systems (such as the electronic medical record (eMR)) that can capture nursing in a coded, computational form.

The SNT is applied to specific nursing documentation within clinical information systems. With the advent of generative artificial intelligence, it is critical that we adopt SNT as a data enabler.

The adoption of a nationwide SNT would allow healthcare practitioners, regardless of their location or healthcare system, to understand exactly what is meant when discussing interventions, promoting clear communication, and reducing the risk of misunderstanding or errors in patient care. SNT also acknowledges the holistic approach nurses take in their practice and will help to highlight the full scope of nursing interventions, ensuring that all aspects of nursing care are recognised and valued; leveraging health services’ digital capability to make nursing visible. Adopting and embedding nationwide standardised nursing terminology within a suitably structured digital ecosystem will allow the profession to:

- Demonstrate the value of nurses and midwives’ contribution to healthcare.
- Manage nursing resources.
- Support data analytics by making use of quality-coded nursing data.
- Support continuity of care across health services.
- Enhance patient outcomes within and between health services.
- Facilitate interoperability between organisations; and
- Develop decision support algorithms and generative artificial intelligence protocols.

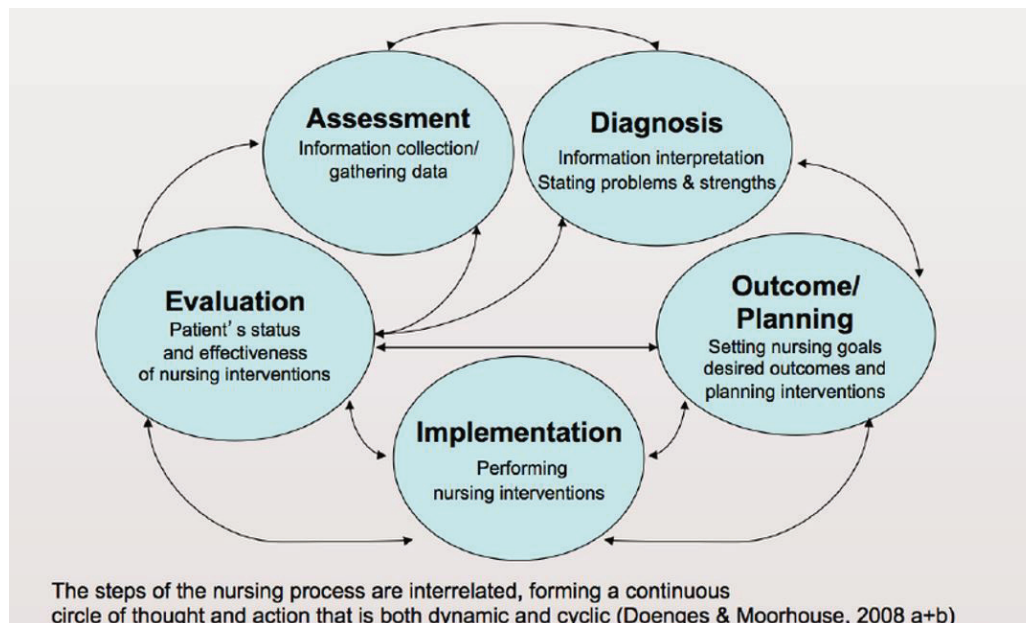
The position statement has been developed to highlight the need for SNT in Australia, leveraging health services' digital capability to make nursing, and the contribution of nurses, visible in providing data for analysis of themes, trends and gaps. It provides the nursing profession with an understanding of the benefits of national SNT adoption and use of SNT to enable comprehensive nursing data collection and analysis (Macieira, 2019). It notes that the adoption of SNT alone is not enough to create clinical decision support or generative artificial intelligence but is required to achieve and optimise these.

Making nursing visible requires adopting and using an SNT to enable the identification of themes, trends, and gaps. Many countries adopted SNT when they pioneered the use of electronic clinical information systems and, therefore, can perform a range of activities from nursing documentation to analytics in an automated, comprehensive manner (Thoroddsen et al, 2012). With the advances in digital platforms Australia is nationally now well-placed to adopt SNT as a national nursing digital standard.

SNTs enable the sharing and comparing of nursing data across settings, countries, and languages. The data from nursing documentation can support clinical decision-making, evaluate nursing care and patient outcomes, assist with policy development, nursing research and resource management and generate nursing knowledge.

Critical components of an SNT are nursing assessment (diagnosis) or focus of care, nursing interventions and nurse-sensitive patient care outcomes. The use of a standardised nursing language will provide the opportunity for the seamless sharing of patient data between healthcare systems, as each of these is coded to support semantic interoperability (the ability of systems to exchange data with an unambiguous, shared meaning). This enables efficient nursing data exchange to allow for informed, consistent decision-making. This benefits patients and nurses by connecting to a broader base of local understanding. Without adopting an SNT, inconsistencies in language will impede the collection and collation of statistical data for the whole of Australia, resulting in the inability to demonstrate nurses' significant contributions to health care (Fennelly, 2021; Hovenga, 2003). A standardised terminology facilitates the comparison of nursing practices and outcomes across different healthcare facilities. This enables benchmarking for quality improvement initiatives and nursing research and development of the domain of nursing practice and nursing knowledge. The advanced nursing process framework is supported, i.e., Assess, Diagnose (or focus on nursing care), Plan, Implement, and Evaluate (Figure 1). Another major benefit of SNT is supporting transferable knowledge when nurses move to different healthcare settings.

Figure 1 Application of nursing process and nursing diagnosis: Ch 7 2008



Internationally the most common SNT are the International Classification of Nursing Practice (ICNP) and North American Nursing Diagnosis (NANDA). The ACN Nursing Informatics and Digital Health Faculty promote using ICNP, now largely mapped to the Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine (SNOMED CT) AU. The Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA) has acquired the license to use SNOMED CT AU within clinical information systems (i.e., electronic medical records). ICNP is a complete SNT representing nursing diagnoses, interventions, and nurse-sensitive patient outcome concepts.

KEY ISSUES

1. There is a risk of nursing care becoming increasingly invisible. Without computerised coded nursing care data/information, health services have no way of being able to accurately and consistently collect and analyse critical aspects of nursing care.

2. Nursing care delivery is unable to be measured. We need to adopt a national SNT, which is required to demonstrate nursing's contribution to patient safety and health care outcomes to collect, analyse, and measure critical aspects of nursing care.

3. Planning and investment are required for SNT for the Australian context. Other countries have mandated the use of SNT in regions or across the whole country after considerable assessment and demonstrated benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACN advocates for adoption of SNT consistently across the health care environment, and:

1. Endorses the International Classification of Nursing Practice (ICNP) as the preferred Australian SNT based on the expert guidance of the ACN Nursing Informatics and Digital Health Faculty;
2. Promotes nurses as vital stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and frameworking of SNT across relevant Government bodies and associations, and embedding of SNT in the Australian nursing curriculum;

3. Supports the ethical collection and use of nursing analytics from SNT to identify themes, trends, and gaps for innovation and economic evaluation to improve professional and patient outcomes, and to evaluate nursing interventions;
4. Encourages nurse contribution, via education or grants, to Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) to enable the seamless and secure exchange of health care information;
5. Advocates for the development of standard data value sets that best reflect nursing's contribution to health and are suitable for every nursing specialty to support the national measurement of the value of nursing's contribution to the delivery of healthcare;
6. Supports the research work being undertaken by the collaborative ICN accredited centre for ICNP research and development established at the Australian Catholic University with support from Monash Health.

CONCLUSION

ACN urges the adoption of SNT as a data enabler and as a critical adjunct to the successful implementation of generative artificial intelligence in Australian healthcare. The adoption of a standard nursing terminology will act to make nursing visible by enabling the identification of themes, trends, and gaps while also enabling benchmarking for quality improvement initiatives.

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