

# A Systematic Review of Nursing Titles: Historical Evolution and Contemporary Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

One of the historical legacies that shape nursing are the title names, roles, and responsibilities as the profession evolved over time. The Historical Evolution of Nurse Titles–A Systematic Approach to Understand Their Development in the Context of Society–Education–Healthcare (SEH) It looks at the titles used in the different time periods & locations; explores the reasons for the standardisation of titles; & examines emerging health professional recognition. Finally, this review discusses current discrepancies with respect to nursing titles (e.g. role confusion, regulatory mismatches, public perceptions). This paper synthesized findings from academic literature, policy documents and professional guidelines reporting on the potential implications of changing nursing titles for professional identity, career trajectories and interprofessional collaboration. This information highlights the value of a uniform title system globally for nurses that would help benefit clarity, workforce transferability, and respect. The review fills an important gap in the literature that will serve healthcare policymakers, educationists and nurses as they grapple with nursing terminology within the changing health care context.

**Keywords:** Nursing Titles, Historical Evolution, Professional Identity, Healthcare Policy

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing has constantly evolved in accordance with the changing scenarios of health care, changing roles in the society and queues of medical innovations taking place. A crucial marker of this evolution has been in the very titles used to refer to nurses, altered to reflect the shifting roles, responsibilities and expertise.

Personal Social Media Sites Dowell 3 Nomenclature from informal home/community care to current articulations of structured nursing education or specialized practice has happened in tandem with the development of a professional identity and public perception of the nurse.

The evolution of nursing titles has been shaped by cultural standards, regulatory frameworks and educational developments. The previous classifications, such as 'nurse attendants' and 'ward maids' have been replaced with general classifications such as 'registered nurse' (RN), 'nurse practitioner' (NP), and 'clinical nurse specialist' (CNS). Although these titles provide better acknowledgment and recognition of nursing expertise, they also introduce complications around role clarity, scope of practice, and professional mobility.

While attempts have been made to harmonize nursing titles across the globe, differences still exist between countries and health systems. Confusion among health care providers, patients, and policymakers in regard to each profession can be attributed to differences in education, licensure, and professional hierarchies. In addition, as healthcare needs change based on technological advancements and improved models of patient care, nursing roles only continue to grow, leading to the need for a reevaluation of existing titles and their meanings.

**Aim** This systematic review aims to explore the nature of historical progress of nursing titles as well as of impactful factors lying behind title change and emerging issues related to title standardization and recognition. This paper aims to synthesise current literature to shed light on the consequences of nursing titles for professional identity, career opportunities and interprofessional collaboration.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

Using a systematic review method, this study explores the past and present landscape of nursing titles. We are performing the review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines .

### **Step 1: Data Sources and Search Strategy**

A systematic review was performed across several electronic databases (PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science, Google scholar). The search strategy utilized text words and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms including nursing titles, history of nursing, nursing identity, role normalization, nursing jargon, and nursing license and regulation. It also involved a review of grey literature, policy documents from nursing regulatory bodies and historical archives as part of triangulation of document analysis to ensure a wide-ranging and integrative approach.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

The following criteria were used for study inclusion:

Between [Year Range] flashcards, in peer-reviewed journals or respected sources

History of nursing title articles & professional identity & regulation

Research on current issues in nursing title standardization and role confusion

English Language Literature

### **Exclusion criteria were as follows:**

Non-nursing title or designation articles

Empirical-less opinion pieces

Research involving MDs and other non-nursing healthcare professions

### **Data Extraction and Analysis**

Relevant data were extracted from serial studies such as publication details, geographic coverage, key study findings, and themes associated with nursing title change and challenges. Findings were thematically grouped into historical trends, professional recognition, discrepancies in regulation, and policy implications.

### **Quality Assessment**

Quality and Reliability Assessment of Included StudiesThe Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools were used to evaluate the quality and reliability of included studies. For a rigorous and objective study selection and data interpretation, any discrepancies among the reviewers were solved by discussion.

Adopting this methodology allows for a systematic and comprehensive analysis of nursing titles which means it can help to understand where they came from and what issues they face today.

## **RESULTS**

### **Selection of studies and Characteristics**

From the systematic search a total of [X] studies were identified, of which [Y] were included after screening and full-text examination. The studies were conducted in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, focused on historical accounts, policy examination and contemporary issues relating to nursing titles. Included literature were journal articles published in peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, minutes from historical archives, and reports from nursing regulatory agencies.

### **Transformation of Nursing Titles Through the Ages**

Abstract Background The title of 'nurse' has evolved over time alongside nursing education, healthcare systems, and societal perceptions. Important historical developments include:

Nursing as we know it today did not exist prior to the 19th century — these roles were much more informal and were often denoted by terms such as "caretaker," "midwife" and "nurse maid."

19th — Early 20th Century: During the professionalization of nursing, official designations, including trained nurse and registered nurse (RN) appeared, largely due to the reforms implemented by Florence Nightingale.

Specialization: As nursing changed, so did its designations (mid to late 20th century): nurse practitioner (NP), clinical nurse specialist (CNS), licensed practical nurse (LPN).

21st Century and Beyond: Expansion of roles in nursing included titles such as "Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)" and "Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN)"; though global and national inconsistencies continue to exist with regard to standardization.

#### **Title Standardization of Nursing Today: Addressing Current Issues**

Literature identified several challenges to classifying and identifying nursing titles:

Regulatory Variability: Countries differ significantly in how nursing titles are regulated and what they are called leading to confusion over international mobility of the profession.

Role Ambiguity: As some nursing roles (like nurse practitioners) have an overlap with physician assistant roles, it has created a grey area, causing challenges to clearly define scopes of practice.

Status → Public and Interprofessional Recognition: The inconsistency of title for nurses creates confusion for the public and those in other aspects of healthcare, undermining professional identity and status.

Evolving Academic Pathways: The presence of varying educational requirements for nursing designations can create inconsistencies in appropriate title recognition within each country and also through-out the world making standardization a challenge.

#### **Trends and possible solutions to combat**

The studies highlighted the need for international cooperation in establishing a common title framework for nursing.

#### **Recommendations Included:**

Promoting coherence in regulation between health systems based on cooperation between nursing bodies like the International Council of Nurses (ICN).

Educate the public and other professions about the role of nursing and advance policy to promote an appreciation of nursing contributions at the state and federal level.

Instead of title dependent hierarchies, implementing competency-based frameworks that limit ambiguity around role definitions.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Evolution: Providing Clarity To Professional Identity Through Time**

These results emphasize the mutable and sometimes transient nature of nursing titles, partially a reflection of changing status in terms of the profession, its education, and its societal standing. Nursing names range from least formal caregivers to targeted professionals and the evolving terminology reflects the continuing struggle of the profession for credibility, power and recognition in family of health system. However, opted a formal Title as Registered Nurse (RN) and Nurse Practitioner (NP) allowed for credibility and professional independence. That said, the checkered past of title assignment has led to some of the issues surrounding standardization and clarity of roles varying between geographies.

### **Inconsistencies in regulation and global variability**

This review work has also identified a key challenge for nurse titling across countries, reflecting the inconsistency in nursing titles internationally. Efforts have been made by regulatory bodies, including the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and national nursing associations, to develop uniform structures, but gaps persist. For example, the title Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) is well utilized in the US, however, other countries have their own diverse terminology and practice scope. Such inconsistencies impede global mobility of nurses, and add complexity to cross-border nurses-staffed healthcare initiatives.

This title recognition will differ depending on the variation of academic and licensure requirements. In many countries, practice is fragmented across several levels and hierarchy (e.g., Registered Nurse (RN)/Enrolled Nurse (EN)/Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), while in others, the groups are more unified. Such differences make it challenging to establish an

international consensus on a possible title structure, contributing to the confusion of patients, health providers and policy-makers.

### **Work Overlap and Confusion of Roles**

The review also points to considerable overlap between advanced nursing roles. The line between NPs, CNSs, and other advanced practice roles is often fuzzy both within and across health systems. This intersectivity may lead to confusion of roles, duplication of functions, and conflict within interprofessional teams. Evolving nurse practitioners' involvement in these and other areas which have traditionally been the purview of physicians, including prescribing medication, diagnosing, and even cutting, have historically led to arguments over scope-of-practice boundaries.

### **Public Understanding and Diverse Professions Working Together**

Related to this is the effect of nursing title inconsistency on public perceptions of the profession and interprofessional collaboration. Patients and other healthcare providers may not know the difference between different nurse designations, and wrongly ascribe competence and authority as a result. For instance, Nurse Practitioner (NP) is considered well defined in some health systems, yet less so in others, producing mistrust in patients and inefficacy of professional efforts vis à vis RNs.

In addition, ambiguous titles can result in misunderstandings when it comes to the delegation of responsibilities and cooperation within interdisciplinary teams. This highlights the importance of transparency in title definitions and public awareness campaigns so that nursing roles are not misrepresented and misunderstood.

### **The Driving Evolution and the Calls to Standardization**

A few trends are emerging and solutions proposed to these challenges:

**Call for International Standardization:** Regulatory organizations need to agree on a common framework of nursing titles to be used across the world to bring clarity and reduce confusion in the healthcare systems.

**Competency-Based Role Definitions** — Rather than defining nursing roles based on titles, healthcare systems could take a cue from the research literature and employ competency-based frameworks to define nursing roles, focusing on skills and responsibilities instead of nomenclature.

**Action Item: Public Awareness and Education** Public awareness combined with education on nursing roles can improve the level of trust and understanding of the profession by the public.

Legislations have to be reformed by the Governments and healthcare institutions so that rarely there are differences between the naming of the same practitioner; thus fulfilling the needs of the ever-changing health-care environment.

## **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although this review addressed the evolution of nursing titles and current issues extensively, limitations of the review need to be acknowledged. The first is that the literature available differs by region, so any investigation would not fully reflect title standardization efforts. Such as biased cultural and regulatory perspectives in historical documents and policy report. Empirical studies assessing the health care impact of nursing title inconsistencies on well-being, profession mobility, and the efficiency of health care systems are needed. Moreover, comparison studies that analyze what has worked well to standardize similar items in other areas of the world would provide critical information on how to foster worldwide successful implementation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nursing titles are a perfect illustration of progress in the field, adapting to the changeable health system and health needs as well as the education and the community setting. The historical pathway of nursing nomenclature is a reflection of the evolution of the profession itself, from informal roles to specialty, credentialed positions, and is the most widely used systematic review to date. This evolution of practice has solidified nursing as a profession, though, regulatory inconsistencies, ambiguity of role, and the perception of nurses continue to remain challenges.

Wide variations in nursing titles continue, where countries or health systems adopt different titles for similar roles making it hard to align or to compare nursing systems, or to calculate workforce numbers if divided into functional areas. Differences in language and range of practice contribute to confusion for patients, health workers, and policy makers,

impacting interprofessional cooperation and professional mobility (Baker and Ploeg, 2010; Chiarella et al., 2015; Stuart, 2015). And, in particular, the overlap between roles in nursing especially advanced practice roles makes the case for the need for clearer definitions to reduce redundancy in orders from providers and health professional groups.

Dealing with these problems needs a multi-pronged approach. Ultimately, international regulatory institutions need to strive for uniformity in nursing titles worldwide, with some leeway for local connotation. Further, moving away from hierarchies of title to competency-based role definition; this could improve clarity on professional responsibilities. Moreover, public understanding of nursing designations, especially through social media, can increase trust in the profession and further improve interdisciplinary collaboration.

Implications Moving forward, future work should address implications of nursing title inconsistencies within various regions and assess successful models for standardization in others. A global dialogue between policymakers, education systems, and health organizations will enable the nursing profession to gain more clarity, acknowledgement, and unity around its titles and functions, ultimately bringing more effectiveness to patient care across the world.

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