

## The Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework

### Introduction

Admiral Nurses are specialist dementia care nurses. Their casework focuses primarily on the needs of carers and supporters of people with a dementia. Their educative and consultative role aims to improve the delivery of dementia services.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Gerontological Nursing Programme were funded by **for dementia** to work part-time from August 2000 to March 2002, to develop the *Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework*. A full account of the Competency Project is presented in the final report (Traynor and Dewing, 2002). The aim of the project was to use an action research approach to work with Admiral Nurses to develop a competency framework for the Admiral Nurse Service that reflected the Nursing and Midwifery Council's Higher Level Practice standards (HLP) (UKCC, 2002).

The outcome of the project is the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework, which contains a set of competency statements describing what is expected of Admiral Nurses, and accompanying documentation to work through the Competency Framework. The main aim of the Competency Framework is to support and facilitate Admiral Nurses to produce portfolios of evidence about their competence to practise. In addition, the Competency Framework provides a structured pathway for Admiral Nurses, who wish to, to work towards the NMC's Higher Level Practice award (UKCC, 2002).

### Overview of the Competency Project and the Competency Framework

The Admiral Nurses actively participated in the project and the Competency Framework structure and content directly reflects their input. Other stakeholders' views about the Admiral Nurse Service were also sought and utilised. An Advisory Group, made up of representatives from various areas, also reviewed the work from the beginning of the project. The aim of the Advisory Group was to ensure that the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework met various national

agendas. For example, competency based approaches to education and career development; dementia nursing (in a broader context than the Admiral Nurse Service); managers' issues; the vision for advanced practice in nursing; and carers' issues in dementia. In this way, the Competency Framework reflects what Admiral Nurses and other stakeholders expect, and want, from the Admiral Nurse Service.

The Competency Framework is made up of a set of 'outcomes based' competency statements, this is in line with the NMC's approach to describing nursing practice. The framework also includes documentation (including different *Tools* to help work through the Competency Framework and information on the role of the *Competency Companion*) to help guide Admiral Nurses demonstrating their competence to practise as an Admiral Nurse. The competency statements are used to describe explicitly the impact of Admiral Nurses' practise on the lives of their clients. Admiral Nurses can use the documentation in the Competency Framework to develop work-based examples of evidence that show their practise is competent, that are then demonstrated in a portfolio.

The evidence is drawn from a wide range of sources to ensure all aspects of the work Admiral Nurses undertake is captured (see Figure 1). An Admiral Nurse will use his or her portfolio during their career as an Admiral Nurse to demonstrate, over time, improved practise and higher levels of competence. Thus, the outcome of developing the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework is a structure for ongoing work-based learning and for both practice and professional development.

### Developing the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework

The contents of the competency statements are structured around eight core competencies and are used to describe the day-to-day work of the Admiral Nurse. See Box 1 for the core competencies, described as the eight core competencies for the Admiral Nurses.

- (1) Therapeutic work (interventions)
- (2) Sharing information about dementia and carer issues
- (3) Advanced assessment skills
- (4) Prioritising work
- (5) Preventative work and health promotion
- (6) Ethical and person centred care
- (7) Balancing the needs of the carer and the person with dementia
- (8) Promoting best practice

**Box 1: The eight core competencies for the Admiral Nurses**

The Admiral Nurses chose to have three levels of Admiral Nurse competence described within the Competency Framework. Three levels of competency statements, for each core competency, were therefore developed. Admiral Nurses will be able to use the competency statements to develop their practise towards one of these three levels of competence. In Box 2 below, the three levels of Admiral Nurse competence are listed.

- (1) Intermediate
- (2) Advanced
- (3) Expert

**Box 2: The three levels competence for Admiral Nurse practise**

Admiral Nurses can use the competency statements to create opportunities for demonstrating their competence at the level towards which they are working. The three levels of competence can also be used to outline what is expected of Admiral Nurses at different places in their career as an Admiral Nurse. The aim of using the approach is to provide Admiral Nurses with a structure for thinking about how to develop their practise over time, thereby providing a framework for long-term development within the Admiral Nurse Service. In this way, the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework also reflects the Department of Health's (2001) vision for competency based career frameworks for health professionals.

The Competency Framework also addresses other national policy and practice agendas. An original aim of the Competency Project was to develop a structured pathway for Admiral Nurses, who wish to, to work towards the NMC's Higher Level Practice award (UKCC, 2002). It was important to

ensure that the competency statements made explicit what was expected of an Admiral Nurse aiming to demonstrate Higher Level Practice.

The NMC's seven Higher Level Practice standards are described in Box 3. Competency statements were developed around the NMC's seven Higher Level Practice standards, at each of the three levels of competency.

- (1) Providing effective health care
- (2) Leading and developing practice
- (3) Improving quality and health outcomes
- (4) Innovation and changing practice
- (5) Evaluation and research
- (6) Developing self and others
- (7) Working across professional and organisational boundaries

**Box 3: The NMC's seven Higher Level Practice standards (UKCC, 2002)**

***Implementing the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework***

The Competency Framework implementation is steered by the Competency Framework Implementation Group. This group is led by the Consultant Nurse and draws its membership from Admiral Nurses and other key stakeholders. Box 4 below lists the Terms of Reference of the group.

- (1) The core purpose of the Competency Implementation Group is:  
Produce the Admiral Nurses' Competency Framework  
Produce an Implementation Plan  
Lead the action of the Implementation Plan  
Evaluate progress  
Disseminate process and outcomes
- (2) The Competency Implementation Group will aim to feedback on progress to:  
Admiral Nurses  
**for dementia** Core Team  
Admiral Nurses Steering and Advisory Committee
- (3) The Competency Framework Implementation Group is able to make decisions with regards to its core purpose, but will aim to consult, involve and include other key stakeholders.

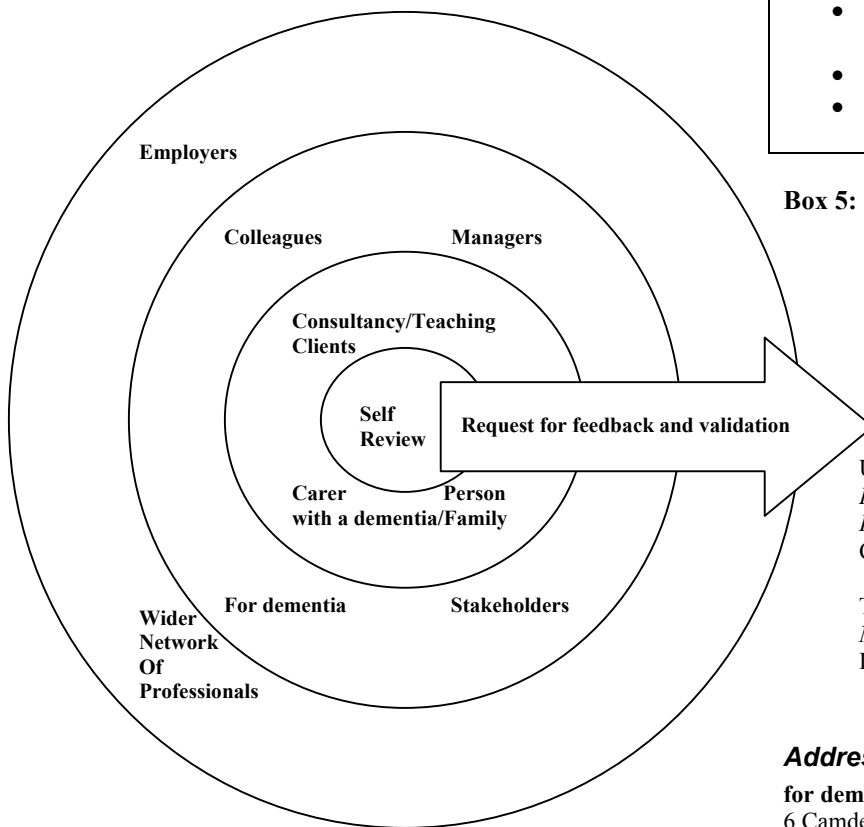
**Note:** All the above will be achieved through working with Admiral Nurses, their managers and teams, **for dementia** and other key stakeholders.

**Box 4: Terms of Reference**

The Admiral Nurses' Competency Project will become an integral part of Admiral Nurse practice. All Admiral Nurses are expected to utilise the Competency Framework as the basis for their ongoing learning and development. This is in line with the move, in nursing, towards becoming a competency-based profession. Admiral Nurses will develop portfolios of evidence of the work they undertake in their role, to use to demonstrate their competence to practice as an Admiral Nurse. Developing and demonstrating competence is fundamental to Admiral Nurse practice, thereby facilitating the development of evidence-based practice and supporting the clinical governance agenda.

### Potential Sources of Evidence

Figure 1 below shows some potential sources of evidence to demonstrate competence.



### Benefits

The potential benefits for Admiral Nurses, people with a dementia and their carers and supporters, colleagues and teams, and organisations are shown in Box 5.

### Potential Benefits

- The Admiral Nurse service is made more explicit
- Clients know what to expect from the service
- Promotes partnership working
- Encourages shared working processes and outcomes within and between teams
- Contributes towards development and evaluation of Admiral Nurse service as an evidence-based profession
- Supports improving client care
- Promotes dissemination of practice
- Encourages career development
- Supports professional development
- Adds prestige to Admiral Nurse service as it values Admiral Nurse knowledge, skills and expertise
- Can be used to support appraisals
- Can contribute to NMC re-registration
- Offers a pathway towards NMC Higher Level Practice award (UKCC, 2002)
- Supports recruitment
- Provides a framework for developing Admiral Nurse roles

### Box 5: Potential Benefits

#### References

Department of Health (2001). *Pay Modernisation: Agenda for Change in the NHS*. London: Department of Health

United Kingdom Central Council (2002). *Report of the Higher Level of Practice Pilot and Project*. London: Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Traynor, V., and Dewing, J. (2002). *Admiral Nurses Competency Project: Final report*. London: RCN Institute.

### Address for Correspondence

**for dementia**  
6 Camden High Street, London NW1 0JH  
Telephone: 020 7 874 7210

*This summary was adapted from Traynor and Dewing (2002), and Competency Framework Implementation Group work in progress (2003).*