

A normal day in the life of a neonatal nurse practitioner: experience report

O cotidiano de um enfermeiro neonatologista de prática avançada: relato de experiência

El cotidiano de un enfermero neonatólogo de práctica avanzada: relato de experiencia

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Abstract

This experience report provides an expert opinion on the daily routine and responsibilities of a neonatal nurse practitioner within the framework of the nurse practitioner role in the Netherlands. The aim is to enhance understanding of the unique contributions made by nurse practitioners in delivering high-quality care to newborns and their families in the Dutch healthcare system, by showcasing the diverse clinical, educational, and research activities involved. Therefore, it highlights the specific scope of practice for nurse practitioners in neonatology, the collaborative approach between healthcare professionals and parents, and the importance of family-centered care, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature on the role of the practitioner nurse, emphasizing the adherence to national guidelines and protocols.

Resumo

Este relato de experiência oferece uma opinião especializada sobre a rotina diária e as responsabilidades de um enfermeiro neonatologista na função de prática avançada de enfermagem na Holanda. O objetivo é melhorar a compreensão das contribuições únicas feitas pelos enfermeiros, na prestação de cuidados de alta qualidade aos recém-nascidos e suas famílias no sistema de saúde holandês, ao mostrar as diversas atividades clínicas, educacionais e de pesquisa envolvidas na prática avançada. Dessa maneira o enfoque abrange o escopo específico do enfermeiro de prática avançada em neonatologia, a abordagem colaborativa entre profissionais de saúde e pais e a importância do cuidado centrado na família. Oferecendo insights valiosos sobre a natureza multifacetada do papel, enfatizando a adesão às diretrizes e protocolos nacionais.

Resumen

Este relato de experiencia ofrece una opinión experta sobre la práctica diaria y las responsabilidades de un enfermero neonatólogo en la función de enfermería de práctica avanzada en los Países Bajos. El objetivo es mejorar la comprensión de las contribuciones únicas realizadas por los enfermeros al ofrecer atención de alta calidad a los recién nacidos y sus familias en el sistema de salud holandés mostrando las diversas actividades clínicas, educativas y de investigación involucradas en la práctica avanzada. De esta manera, el enfoque abarca el rol específico de la enfermería de práctica avanzada en neonatología, el enfoque colaborativo entre profesionales de la salud y padres y la importancia de los cuidados centrados en la familia. Ofrece información valiosa sobre la naturaleza interdisciplinaria de la función, enfatizando el cumplimiento de las directrices y protocolos nacionales.

Keywords

Neonatal nurse practitioner; Scope of practice; Educational activities, Dutch healthcare system

Descritores

Enfermeira neonatologista; Escopo de prática; Atividades educativas; Sistema de saúde holandês

Descriptores

Enfermería neonatal; Enfermería de práctica avanzada; Rol de la enfermera; Actividades educativas; Sistema de salud del países bajos

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, a 'certified nurse specialist' refers to a nurse practitioner who has completed a two-year dual Master's Program, known as Master in Advanced Nursing Practice (MANP). This program encompasses both theoretical education and practical training in a specialized field, such as neonatology for those aspiring to become Neonatal Nurse Practitioners (NNP). In fact, to become a Nurse Practitioner (NP), nurses need to work at least as a NP (trainee) for 32 hours a week during the MANP, which includes theoretical classes that extend over a two-year duration. Contrarily to Brazil, is the trainee's responsibility to find a university and an advisor that supports their study, as well as the practical NP field.⁽¹⁾

To attain the official title of '(certified) nurse specialist,' the individual must be registered in the official Dutch registry for nurse specialists. This registry is overseen and operated by the Registration Commission for Nurse Specialists. Registration is a crucial step, as only after being registered can the nurse specialist legally use the title and practice independently within their scope of expertise.⁽²⁾

The work experience requirement is that a NP must have worked at least 4,160 hours during 5 years as a NP within their specialism. Of those 4,160 hours, he/she must have worked at least half (2,080 hours) in direct patient care. This includes all patient-related activities.

The educational and certification journey involves comprehensive theoretical coursework, hands-on practical experience, and successful completion of the certification test administered by the relevant professional organization or certifying body. Once registered, the certified nurse specialist gains professional recognition and is authorized to provide advanced care in their specialized field, be it neonatal care or any other area of expertise.⁽³⁾

It is essential for aspiring nurse specialists, including those aiming to become neonatal nurse practitioners, to adhere to the specific educational requirements, certification processes, and registration procedures set by the governing bodies. Staying updated with the latest information and guidelines from reputable sources is crucial for a successful career as a certified nurse specialist in the Netherlands.⁽⁴⁾

As a NNP, the primary focus of the daily routine is delivering comprehensive and standardized care to newborns in the neonatal unit. This role integrates clinical expertise, educational activities, and participation in research to promote the well-being of infants and their families.

This article provides valuable insights into the typical daily routine of a neonatal nurse practitioner, specifically highlighting the diverse responsibilities and the significant impact of their work at Erasmus University, Sophia's Children's Hospital in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Background

In the Netherlands, to work as a registered nurse, a four-year bachelor's degree is mandatory.⁽⁴⁾ Advancing to become a Certified Nurse Specialist requires pursuing a 2-year dual Master of Advanced Nursing Practice (MANP) degree.⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾

Nurse practitioners (NPs) play a vital role in the reallocation of tasks within the medical field, bringing a nursing perspective to their specialized area of medicine. They adopt a holistic approach that extends beyond clinical work, focusing on family-oriented care. NPs serve as crucial liaisons between various health-care professionals, bridging the gap between caregiving and curative roles.⁽⁸⁾

In the Netherlands, the role of Registered Nurse Practitioners is regulated by three distinct bodies. The Council for Registered Nurse Practitioners (CSV) establishes requirements for education, registration, and re-registration, including specialization categorization. The Registration Commission for Nurse Practitioners (RSV) implements CSV rules, managing educational programs and overseeing registration and re-registration processes. The Commission for Objection and Appeal (CvBB) serves as an independent judiciary role, allowing affected individuals to object or appeal RSV decisions. Nurse specialists actively engage in auditing their own Master's Programs, covering both theoretical and practical aspects, and assess fellow practitioners' portfolios to ensure adherence to quality standards for re-registration.⁽⁴⁾

This framework grants NPs the autonomy to independently indicate, perform, and delegate treat-

ments that adhere to two key criteria: procedures routinely performed and strictly protocolled according to nationally recognized guidelines, standards, and protocols.^(4,9)

The practice of dedicated neonatal nurse practitioners began in the Netherlands around 2001.⁽¹⁾ This brought about significant changes for both nurses and physicians involved in neonatal care. Nurse practitioners experienced an expansion of their responsibilities and gained more autonomy in providing care to neonates. This, in turn, led to increased job satisfaction and professional growth among the nursing staff. For physicians, having nurse practitioners as part of the team allowed them to focus on more complex medical cases while fostering a close and collaborative relationship with the nursing team, ultimately benefiting patient outcomes.

The acceptance of this practice has been positive for both nurses and physicians. Nurses embraced the opportunity to take on a more specialized role in neonatal care, while physicians appreciated the support and expertise brought by the nurse practitioners, enhancing the efficiency of the care they provide.

However, as with any significant change in healthcare practices, there were some initial challenges. Relationships between nurses and physicians faced some difficulties in day-to-day interactions. These issues may have arisen from adjustments to new roles and responsibilities, communication gaps, or differences in approach. Nonetheless, with time and effective communication, these challenges were addressed, leading to improved collaboration between nurses and physicians in neonatal care.⁽¹⁰⁾

The clinical responsibilities of NPs encompass a diverse range of tasks. They conduct patient consultations, prescribe medications, develop treatment plans, request and conduct examinations, and coordinate overall patient care. Additionally, NPs are authorized to perform medical procedures such as endotracheal intubation, lumbar and bladder punctures, and the placement of central venous catheters (CVCs).^(4,11)

Since 2009, NPs in the Netherlands have been included in the BIG-register (Individual Healthcare Professions Act), subjecting them to medical disciplinary law. NPs have completed a master's degree in advanced nursing practice and are registered as

nurse specialists. They are entitled to use the title "MSc" (Master of Science), reflecting their professional qualifications.

NPs work in various healthcare settings in the Netherlands, including general practices, hospitals, ambulances, nursing homes, mental healthcare facilities, and youth healthcare centers. The scope of care provided by NPs is specific to their department or specialization, ensuring expertise in their designated areas.^(11,12)

The role of the nurse practitioner in neonatology, as discussed in this publication, aligns with the defined scope of practice and professional qualifications upheld by nurse practitioners in the Netherlands.

Field experience report

The day begins with a handover from the previous shift, during which the nurse practitioner receives updates on the newborns under their care. This includes critical cases, recent admissions, and any changes in the infants' conditions. The information obtained during the handover allows the nurse practitioner to prioritize tasks and allocate resources accordingly. Following the handover, the nurse practitioner proceeds to assess the infants, considering their medical history, vital signs, and overall well-being. Special attention is given to high-risk cases, premature infants, and those with complex medical conditions. This assessment helps identify immediate interventions and facilitates ongoing care planning. A vital aspect of the nurse practitioner's role is family-centered care. Collaborating with parents, the nurse practitioner takes into account their preferences, knowledge, values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Empowering families to actively participate in their child's care and decision-making is a primary goal. The nurse practitioner provides support, encourages parental involvement, and maintains open communication to address any concerns. Throughout the day, the nurse practitioner engages in consultations with parents, discussing reasons for admission, providing information, answering questions, and collaboratively determining the progress and potential discharge plans for the newborns. These consultations are crucial for ensuring that parents are engaged and well-informed

about their child's condition, fostering a sense of partnership in the care process. In addition to patient care, the nurse practitioner assumes a role in task reallocation within the medical domain. They may serve as case managers, providing specific care for complex children admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for an extended period. The NP directs the communication between the parents and the various professionals involved. Educational activities form an integral part of the nurse practitioner's routine. They are leading training sessions for colleagues on various topics such as acute newborn care, resuscitation techniques, and the use of specialized equipment in the neonatal unit. Sharing their expertise contributes to enhancing the overall knowledge and skills of the healthcare team. Engagement in research is another important aspect of the nurse practitioner's daily routine. Actively participating in ongoing research projects, the nurse practitioner contributes to data collection, analyzes findings, and disseminates knowledge through publications and presentations. This dedication to research helps advance the field of neonatology and promotes evidence-based practices for optimal patient outcomes. Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical to the nurse practitioner's role. Regular participation in multidisciplinary team meetings enables the discussion of complex cases, facilitates the exchange of information, and collectively develops care plans. This collaboration involves working closely with physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, social workers, and other healthcare professionals to ensure comprehensive and coordinated care for the infants. As the day progresses, the nurse practitioner continues to conduct rounds, reevaluating the infants' conditions, addressing any changes or concerns, and adjusting treatment plans as necessary. Ongoing support is also provided to families, offering guidance on various aspects such as feeding, developmental milestones, and emotional well-being. At the end of the day, the nurse practitioner participates in the handover to the next shift, providing comprehensive reports on each infant's status, ongoing treatments, and any specific care instructions. This ensures continuity of care and effective communication within the healthcare team, promoting seamless transitions and maintaining a high standard of patient safety.

Discussion

The daily routine of a neonatal nurse practitioner is centered around providing comprehensive and standardized care to newborns in the neonatal unit. The nurse practitioner takes a holistic approach, working closely with the Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP) professionals, the multidisciplinary team, and the parental advisory committee.⁽¹³⁾

Family-centered care is a fundamental aspect of neonatal nursing, and the nurse practitioner recognizes the importance of involving parents in their newborn's care. By considering the preferences, knowledge, and cultural background of parents, the nurse practitioner fosters a collaborative care environment that promotes shared decision-making and empowers parents to actively participate in their child's care.⁽¹⁴⁾

In addition to direct patient care, nurse practitioners play a vital role in the professional development of their colleagues. Through leading training sessions and sharing their expertise, they contribute to enhancing the knowledge and skills of the healthcare team, ensuring optimal care for newborns.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the Netherlands, nurse practitioners play a crucial role in actively participating in ongoing research projects, contributing to data collection, analysis, and the dissemination of knowledge. This commitment promotes evidence-based practices and fosters continuous improvement in neonatal healthcare.

Notably, two significant results have been published as a result of nurse practitioners' involvement in research. Dr. Inge Arnts's and Dr. van Ganzewinkel's achievements exemplify the impact of nurse practitioners' contributions to the field. Dr. Inge Arnts conducted research on vascular access and infection prevention,⁽¹⁵⁾ while Dr. van Ganzewinkel⁽¹⁶⁾ focused on neonatal pain.

Their dedication and participation in research have not only advanced the understanding of critical aspects of neonatal care but have also led to the successful completion of their doctoral degrees. The research outcomes from these studies contribute to enhancing the quality of care provided to neonates, as well as further strengthening the evidence base for neonatal healthcare practices.

In summary, nurse practitioners' active involvement in ongoing research projects, exemplified by the groundbreaking work of Dr. Inge Arnts and Dr. van Ganzewinkel, plays a vital role in advancing neonatal healthcare. Their contributions to data collection, analysis, and knowledge dissemination contribute to evidence-based practices and continuous improvements in the field.

The nurse practitioner also takes on the crucial task of fostering cooperation between various healthcare professionals, acting as a bridge between different specialties. This interdisciplinary collaboration, involving physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, and social workers, ensures comprehensive and coordinated care for newborns and their families.⁽¹⁶⁾

Continuous assessment and monitoring of infants' conditions are integral to the nurse practitioner's daily routine. By conducting rounds and regularly reevaluating newborns, the nurse practitioner can identify any changes or concerns, make necessary adjustments to treatment plans, and provide ongoing support to families. This holistic approach aims to optimize the well-being and outcomes of newborns.⁽¹⁷⁾

Effective communication through comprehensive handover reports ensures the continuity of care between shifts. By providing detailed information about each infant's status and ongoing treatments, nurse practitioners facilitate seamless transitions in care and maintain a high standard of patient safety.⁽¹⁸⁾

Conclusion

To conclude, the daily routine of a neonatal nurse practitioner involves a wide range of responsibilities that focus on family-centered care, education, research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous assessment and monitoring. These dedicated professionals play a vital role in delivering high-quality care to newborns and their families, contributing to positive health outcomes and advancements in the field of neonatology. The nurse practitioner's multifaceted role is essential within the neonatal care team, as their commitment to comprehensive and compassionate care ensures the best possible outcomes for the infants under their supervision.

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