Nurse Practitioners Association of Canada
Association des infirmières et infirmiers praticiens du Canada

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Position Statement

Advancing the Role of the Nurse Practitioner Clinician Scientist in Canada

The Nurse Practitioner Association of Canada (NPAC) strongly advocates for the formal recognition, development, and sustained support of Nurse Practitioner (NP) Clinician Scientist roles across Canada. These roles represent a powerful convergence of clinical expertise and research leadership, uniquely positioning doctoral prepared NPs to lead practice-relevant inquiry and accelerate the integration of evidence into care.[1-4] In the face of rising healthcare complexity, growing demands for evidence-informed decision-making, and a critical need to bridge the gap between research and practice, NP Clinician Scientists are essential for building a more innovative, responsive, and equitable health system.

Background and Rationale

The Clinician Scientist role in nursing is not new—it is deeply rooted in the profession's history.[5] Florence Nightingale, often recognized as the first nurse scientist, exemplified how clinical inquiry can revolutionize patient care.[5] Today, the Nurse Practitioner Clinician Scientist embodies this same spirit, leading research that is firmly grounded in the lived realities of patients and front-line clinicians. Literature across jurisdictions affirms that NP Clinician Scientists are critical change agents who facilitate bi-directional knowledge transfer: transforming research findings into actionable improvements and ensuring that clinical experience informs the research agenda.[1-4] Their dual roles as autonomous care providers and scholars allow them to identify meaningful gaps in care, design pragmatic studies, and translate findings into interventions that enhance patient outcomes, strengthen team-based care, and inform health policy.[6-7]

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Despite their value, few Canadian healthcare organizations have operationalized these roles, and structural barriers—such as lack of protected time, mentorship, funding, and institutional support—remain significant. The inconsistent definition and implementation of NP Clinician Scientist roles across institutions has further limited their uptake and impact.

Call to Action

NPAC calls on health authorities, provincial ministries, academic institutions, and healthcare leaders to:

1. **Recognize and Operationalize the NP Clinician Scientist Role**
    - Adopt formal frameworks and job descriptions that reflect the unique scope, contributions, and dual responsibilities of NP Clinician Scientists. Ensure that these roles are supported through protected time for research, dedicated infrastructure, and academic-practice partnerships.
2. **Invest in Role Development and Research Capacity**
    - Establish mentorship programs, funding opportunities, and research development pathways for NPs at all career stages. Address the well-documented gap in research training and support for NPs in clinical practice settings.
3. **Embed Research Within Clinical Practice**
    - Create environments where scholarly inquiry is normalized and expected as part of advanced practice nursing. Integrate NP-led research into organizational quality improvement initiatives and strategic priorities.
4. **Promote National Collaboration and Policy Alignment**
    - Support the development of a national network of NP Clinician Scientists to share resources, foster peer support, and influence policy. Advance a shared vision of the role across jurisdictions to enable consistency and scale.

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5. **Evaluate and Demonstrate Impact**
    - Implement metrics that capture the contributions of NP Clinician Scientists, including improvements in patient care, staff engagement, system outcomes, and scholarly productivity. Move beyond traditional productivity metrics to value relational, system-level, and equity-focused outcomes.

Evidence of Impact

Across Canada and internationally, emerging examples have demonstrated the significant contributions of NP Clinician Scientists to healthcare innovation and quality improvement. When supported with appropriate infrastructure, protected time, and academic-practice partnerships, these roles have led to the development and implementation of practice-informed research, increased scholarly productivity, and improved translation of evidence into frontline care. NP Clinician Scientists have played a pivotal role in mentoring peers, fostering a culture of inquiry, and building interdisciplinary collaborations that advance both patient outcomes and professional practice. Their embedded presence within clinical environments allows for timely identification of research priorities, rapid-cycle evaluation, and real-time application of findings—all of which are essential for building learning health systems. These early successes underscore the transformative potential of the role and provide a compelling case for its broader adoption and sustainability.

Nurse Practitioners are ideally positioned to lead clinically relevant research that addresses the pressing needs of Canadian healthcare. The NP Clinician Scientist role offers a path forward—one that aligns innovation with care, evidence with experience, and research with impact. To achieve a high performing, learning health system, Canada must invest in the advancement of this critical role. NPAC urges immediate and coordinated action to support the development, funding, and scaling of NP Clinician Scientist roles nationwide.

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About NPAC

The Nurse Practitioners Association of Canada (NPAC) is the national voice of Nurse Practitioners, representing NPs in every province and territory. NPAC advocates for evidence-based policy, education, and practice environments that enable NPs to deliver accessible, high-quality care to all Canadians.

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