

Original Article

IMPLEMENTATION OF ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) refers to a level of nursing practice that is defined by the application of a higher level of clinical knowledge, complex decision-making skills, and clinical competencies that are required for expanded practice. A defining characteristic of Advanced Nursing Practice is its emphasis on evidence-based practice, leadership, and education, along with direct clinical care. In most cases, a master's degree or higher is required as the entry-level qualification for advanced practice nurses. (International Council of Nurses, 2020). This expanded practice is often shaped by the specific context or country in which the nurse is credentialed to practice. In Nigeria, Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is generally defined in alignment with global standards but is also tailored to the specific healthcare needs and policies within the country. ANP in Nigeria involves the provision of specialized and advanced clinical care by nurses who have acquired postgraduate education, particularly at the master's or doctoral levels, and who are equipped with advanced clinical knowledge, decision-making skills, and competencies. (Nnamdi, 2020). The implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice in Nigeria faces several challenges, including regulatory barriers, resistance from other health care professionals, and limited resources for education and training. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government agencies, health care institutions, professional associations, and educational bodies. Including Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Federal Ministry of health, Nurse leaders, prospective Advanced Nursing Practitioners and undergraduate Nursing students.

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INTRODUCTION

Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) refers to a level of nursing practice that is defined by the application of a higher level of clinical knowledge, complex decision-making skills, and clinical competencies that are required for expanded practice. This expanded practice is often shaped by the specific context or country in which the nurse is credentialed to practice.

A defining characteristic of Advanced Nursing Practice is its emphasis on evidence-based practice, leadership, and education, along with direct clinical care. In most cases, a master's degree or higher is required as the entry-level qualification for advanced practice nurses.¹

In Nigeria, Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is generally defined in alignment with global standards but is also tailored to the specific healthcare needs and policies within the country. ANP in Nigeria involves the provision of specialized and advanced clinical care by nurses who have acquired postgraduate education, particularly at the master's or doctoral levels, and who are equipped with advanced clinical knowledge, decision-making skills, and competencies.²

The roles encompassed under Advanced Nursing Practice in Nigeria include clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, and nurse educators. These nurses are expected

to take on leadership roles in clinical settings, contribute to healthcare policy development, and in research and education to advance the nursing profession. Key elements include clinical expertise, leadership and policy influence and education and mentorship.

The implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice in Nigeria faces several challenges, including regulatory barriers, resistance from other health care professionals, and limited resources for education and training. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government agencies, health care institutions, professional associations, and educational bodies. By overcoming these barriers, Nigeria can harness the full potential of Advanced Nursing Practice to improve health care outcomes and ensure a more resilient and effective health care system.³

THE CONCEPT OF ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE

Advanced Nursing Practice is defined as a level of nursing practice that uses extended and expanded skills, experience, and knowledge in assessment, planning, implementation, diagnosis, and evaluation of the care required. It includes roles such as nurse practitioners, clinical nurse

specialists, nurse anesthetists, and nurse midwives.⁴

The World Health Organization (WHO) 2024 defines Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) as a level of nursing practice characterized by a high degree of autonomy, complex decision-making, and advanced clinical skills. Advanced Nursing Practice involves the application of advanced knowledge and skills to provide high-quality, evidence-based care, often including leadership, consultation, and education roles. The definition emphasizes the role of advanced nurses in enhancing healthcare delivery, improving patient outcomes, and supporting healthcare systems.

Nigerian scholar⁵ defines Advanced nursing practice as the practice where nurses utilize advanced knowledge and skills to assess, diagnose, treat, and manage patients' health problems. This includes the authority to prescribe medications, perform advanced procedures, and provide leadership in clinical practice.

An Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) is a nurse who has acquired expert knowledge, complex decision-making skills, and clinical competencies for expanded practice. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) emphasizes that APNs should have a master's degree as a minimum requirement and should be capable of

practicing independently, often in leadership roles in healthcare settings.⁶

According to the ICN, The nature of Advanced nursing practice captures ;

Ability to integrate research, education, practice, and management, High degree of professional autonomy and independent practice, Case management, Advanced health assessment skills, decision-making skills, and diagnostic reasoning skills, Recognized advanced clinical competencies. Provision of consultant services to health providers, Planning, implementing, and evaluating programs, Recognized first point of contact for clients. American Nurses Association⁷, defines Advanced Practice Nurses as nurses who have completed advanced education and training in a specific area of nursing. These nurses are prepared to provide a higher level of care which includes the ability to diagnose and treat complex health conditions.

Historical Perspective of Advanced Nursing Practice.

The history of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) can be traced back to the 19th century when nursing began to be recognized as a distinct profession. Florence Nightingale's pioneering work during the Crimean War laid the foundation for modern nursing, emphasizing the importance of education, research, and

evidence-based practice in improving patient care.

There is evidence that English-trained nurses worked as advanced practice nurses as early as the 1890s in Canadian outpost areas.⁸

The Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) was the first to be formally recognized in the 1950s. Clinical nurse specialist responded to the needs of patients with chronic and complex conditions. Nurse practitioner roles developed later in the 1960s, primarily in response to unmet health care needs particularly in rural areas where primary care physicians were lacking. Advanced nursing practice started with specialist nurses, and is commonly recognized as the nurse practitioner in modern day.⁹

The 1970s through the 1990s were marked by the formal recognition and rapid growth of advanced practice nursing roles. As the healthcare landscape continued to evolve, so too did the roles of nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, nurse midwives, and nurse anesthetists. In the 1970s, the American Nurses Association (ANA) began to define and standardize advanced practice nursing roles, which led to the establishment of certification and licensure requirements for advanced practice nurses (APNs). This period also saw the growth of educational programs specifically designed for advanced practice nurses, with universities offering master's and doctoral-

level programs in various advanced practice specialties.¹⁰

The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant expansion in the scope of practice for advanced practice nurses, particularly nurse practitioners. First trialed in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was the newly formed role of nurse practitioner that gave nurses the opportunity to develop their skills in primary care-based settings, such as general practices. Deemed a success, the first Nursing Practitioner training course was rolled out at the Royal College of Nursing in 1992, from which 15 students blazed the way for nurse practitioners across the country. The role was officially defined in 1996 by the Royal college of nursing council, who revealed the appropriate level of educational preparation necessary for the position.

This was expanded upon in 2002 when the Royal college of nursing council produced official guidance on the role, detailing both the value and support required for the educational development of nurse practitioners. The history of advanced nursing practice demonstrates the profession's adaptability and its critical role in addressing healthcare needs over time, from its origins in specialized nursing roles to the widespread recognition of nurse practitioners.

At present, Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria has brought about

measures and policies to implement advanced nursing practice in Nigeria in 2024 and is working towards having standards acceptable globally.¹¹⁻¹⁵

At University of Ibadan, some advanced practice tracks include: Family Nurse Practitioner, Adult/gerontology Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Anesthetist, Psychiatry and mental health Nurse Practitioner.¹⁶

Pillars of Advanced Nursing Practice

Advanced Nursing Practice is built on several core pillars that support the advanced roles, responsibilities, and competencies of nurses. These pillars ensure that Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) can effectively meet complex health care needs and improve patient outcomes. The main pillars of Advanced Nursing Practice include Clinical Practice, Leadership and Management, Education, Research and Evidence-Based Practice, and Policy and Advocacy¹⁷⁻²⁰

i. Clinical Practice

The clinical practice pillar emphasizes the advanced nursing practices' role in delivering high-level, evidence-based care to patients. Health Education England²¹ outlined the role of advanced nursing practices, stressing the importance of their clinical skills in improving patient care outcome. Research has shown that advanced practice nurse significantly contribute to improved patient outcomes,

particularly in managing chronic diseases and providing primary care.

ii. Education

Education remains a critical pillar, with advanced practice nurses taking on roles as educators for patients, healthcare staff, and nursing students. Recent research has focused on the integration of advanced nursing education into clinical practice, ensuring that advanced practice nurses are well-prepared to meet the demands of the healthcare particularly in ensuring that advanced practice nurses are equipped with the latest research and clinical guidelines. Studies have highlighted the need for continuous professional development and the importance of mentorship in nursing education.²²

iii. Leadership and Management

The leadership pillar has been increasingly recognized for its role in driving healthcare innovation and policy change. Advanced practice nurses are seen as key leaders in healthcare teams, capable of influencing practice standards and advocating for patients. Recent literature has explored the leadership roles of advanced practice nurses in various healthcare settings, emphasizing the need for strong leadership skills to navigate complex healthcare environments.

iv. Research and Evidence-Based Practice

Research is the pillar that has seen significant development recently, particularly in the context of integrating research into clinical practice. There has been a push towards enhancing the research capabilities of advanced practice nurses, with new frameworks and toolkits being developed to support advanced practice nurse in undertaking and applying research in their roles. The creation of research toolkits and the emphasis on evidence-based practice are crucial developments in this area.

V. Policy Influence and Advocacy

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are now being seen as vital contributors to healthcare policy development. Research from the past few years emphasizes the need for advanced practice nurses to engage actively in policy-making processes to advocate for changes that can improve patient care and the healthcare system. This includes influencing policy decisions at local, national, and international levels.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

According to²⁴ Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) in Nigeria started as early as 2000 with efforts to develop and establish specialized roles:

- **2003:** the Nigerian Nurses Association (NNA) and the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH)

initiated discussions on introducing Advanced Nursing Practice.

- **2005:** The first Advanced Nursing Practice conference was held in Abuja, marking the beginning of Advanced Nursing Practice.
- **2006:** The Federal Ministry Of Health established the Department of Nursing Services, which included a unit for Advanced Nursing Practice development.
- **2007:** The Nigerian government approved the establishment of the first advanced nursing practice roles, including Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs).
- **2008:** The University of Ibadan launched the first Master's degree program in Advanced Nursing Practice
- **2010:** The Nigerian Nurses Association (NNA) developed the first Advanced Nursing Practice curriculum and scope of practice guidelines.
- **2012:** The Federal Ministry of Health launched the National Strategic plan for Nursing and Midwifery Development (2012-2016), which included Advanced nursing practice
- **2015:** The Nigerian government approved the establishment of the

Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN), which regulates Advance Nursing Practice.

- **2019:** The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN), launched the Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) program, with the first cohort of Advance Practice Nurses graduating in 2020. Advanced Nursing Practice continues to evolve in Nigeria, with ongoing efforts to develop and expand advanced nursing roles, education and practice.
- **2024:** Advanced Nursing Practice was approved by the coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare.

Policy For Implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice In Nigeria.

The Co-ordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare has approved the introduction of Advance Nursing Practice in the Nursing profession to enhance the scope of Nursing practices and improve access to quality health care and in the Nigerian Health Sector. The introduction of the Advanced Nurse Practitioners according to Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, the initiative aligns with global best practices and has the potential to significantly improve health care delivery across Nigeria. The Nursing and Midwifery

Council of Nigeria has also established an implementation committee to develop a comprehensive implementation plan for Advance Nursing Practice. The implementation plan was officially launched at the Nursing leaders conference in Abuja, March 2024. The conference provided the platform for clear information about the roles and responsibilities of the Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) in health institutions for better collaboration and improved patient care.²⁵

University-Based Pathway for Advanced Nursing Practice.

The establishment of a robust university-based pathway for Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is essential for preparing nurses to meet the complex health care needs of the Nigerian population. This pathway ensures that nurses receive comprehensive education and training, equipping them with the advanced clinical skills, leadership abilities, and research competencies necessary for advanced practice roles. According to American Association of Colleges of Nursing²⁶, the components of a university-based pathway to Advanced Nursing Practice include;

Level 1: Bachelor Of Nursing Science (BNSc) which encompasses a 4-year undergraduate degree to provide a foundation in nursing science and clinical practice, offering comprehensive patient

care, critical thinking, and communication skills

Level 2: Master of Nursing Science (MNSc) which is a 2-Year Post graduate degree

To provide specialization in Advanced Nursing Practice (e.g. Pediatrics, Gerontology, Oncology etc.) including course work and clinical practicum and assuming leadership roles within healthcare.

Level 3: Post graduate Diploma in Advanced Nursing Practice (PGD-ANP) which is a 1 year post graduate diploma involving Advanced clinical training and specialization and a preparation For Advanced Practice Nursing roles.

Level 4: Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) which is a 3 year postgraduate degree that aims to focus on Advanced practice, leadership and research in preparation for expert advanced practice nursing.

Level 5: Post-Doctoral Fellowship in ANP which is a 1-2 year Post-Doctoral Fellowship to improve in advanced research and clinical training in preparation for leadership and academic roles.

In Nigeria, Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is generally defined in alignment with global standards but is also tailored to the specific healthcare needs and policies within the country. The university-based pathway provides a structured approach to Advanced Nursing Practice education and

training, ensuring that Nurses are well-prepared for advanced practice roles and leadership positions. According to Nnamdi²⁷, ANP involves the provision of specialized and advanced clinical care by nurses who have acquired postgraduate education, particularly at the master's or doctoral levels, and who are equipped with advanced clinical knowledge, decision-making skills, and competencies. Hence, Advanced Nursing Practice Pathway shall be in line the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) educational reforms.²⁸⁻³¹

Level 1: Bachelor Of Nursing Science (BNSc) which encompasses a 5-year undergraduate degree to provide a foundation in nursing science and clinical practice, offering comprehensive patient care, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Level 2: Master of Nursing Science (MSc.N) which is a 3-Year Post graduate degree.

Level 3: Advanced Practice Nursing o provide specialization in Advanced Nursing Practice (e.g. Neonatology nursing, Gerontology, Oncology etc.) including course work and clinical practicum and assuming leadership roles within healthcare.

Level 4: Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) (as shall be stipulated by the implementation guidelines)

Level 5: Post-Doctoral Fellowship in ANP (as shall be stipulated by implementation guidelines)

Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) shall provide licensure to practice as an Advanced practice Nurse in Nigeria. These are mandatory continuing education requirements for Advanced practice nurses which include regular updates on best practices, research and policy changes NMCN²⁸.

PROSPECTS OF ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE IN NIGERIA.

The future of Advanced Nursing practice has great prospects, particularly in addressing the evolving healthcare needs of diverse populations within the rapidly developing climate. Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) are increasingly recognized for their ability to provide high-quality, patient-centered, cost-effective care, especially in underserved areas³³.

As healthcare systems continue to emphasize the necessity of preventive care, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) are expected to play a crucial role in chronic disease management and health promotion^{2,28}. This works in addition to the integration of technology, such as telehealth and electronic health records which is

enhancing the scope of practice for APRNs, thus enabling them to reach more patients and improve care coordination. These advancements underscore the importance of continuing education and the expansion of Advanced practice nurses roles to meet the growing demands of the healthcare system.²⁹

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE (ANP) PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA.

According to Reynolds³⁰, implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs in Nigeria is met with various challenges:

Structural Challenges.

Inadequate health care infrastructure: The existing health care infrastructure in Nigeria is often overstretched and under-resourced, making it difficult to create suitable environments for Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) practice.

Shortage of nurses: The country faces a critical shortage of nurses, which can hinder the development of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs due to a limited pool of potential students.

Unequal distribution of health care resources: The uneven distribution of health care facilities and resources across the country can impact the accessibility and feasibility of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs.

Educational Challenges.

Lack of qualified faculty: There is a dearth of qualified nursing educators with the necessary expertise to develop and implement Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) curricula.

Limited access to research and technology: Inadequate access to research facilities and advanced technology can hamper the development of evidence-based Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs.

Financial constraints: The high cost of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) education can be a barrier for potential students, limiting access to the program.

Regulatory Challenges.

Ambiguous scope of practice: The scope of practice for Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is not clearly defined in Nigerian law, leading to uncertainty and potential conflicts with other health care professionals.

Slow pace of regulatory reforms: The regulatory framework for Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) is still evolving, and the process of updating regulations can be time-consuming.

Limited recognition of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) qualifications: The value and recognition of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) qualifications within the health care system may be limited.

Sociocultural Challenges

Patriarchal societal norms: Gender-based disparities and patriarchal attitudes can create challenges for women aspiring to advanced nursing roles.

Negative perceptions of nursing: The profession of nursing is often undervalued and under appreciated, which can discourage individuals from pursuing advanced nursing education.

Brain drain: The migration of skilled health care professionals, including nurses, to other countries can exacerbate the shortage of qualified Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) practitioners.

Regulatory Framework:

According to Ojewole and Amadi Nigeria lacks a well-established regulatory framework to govern the practice of advanced nursing roles. Clear guidelines and regulations are essential to ensure the proper implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs.

Education and Training:

Fawole and Hunponu-Wusu³¹ highlighted a shortage of qualified educators and resources to train nurses for advanced practice roles in Nigeria. Developing robust educational programs and providing continuous training opportunities is crucial.

Acceptance and Recognition:

Traditional views on nursing roles in Nigeria may not fully recognize the value and importance of advanced nursing practice. As noted by Okoronkwo (2017),

promoting awareness and advocating for the significance of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) roles is essential for acceptance and integration.

Resource Constraint:

Limited resources, both in terms of funding and infrastructure, can hinder the successful implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs. Adequate funding, access to technology, and necessary equipment are vital for the effective practice of advanced nursing

Lack of Professional Support:

Building a supportive environment within the health care system is crucial for the successful implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) programs. Collaboration among health care professionals and support from nursing leadership are essential for the growth of advanced nursing practice in Nigeria

Lack of Interest in Research:

For Advanced Nursing Practice to come to stay in Nigeria, the input of research must become necessary, not only for study purposes but for proper implementation to the real life setting in the clinical area. Unfortunately, only very few nurses are interested in research, even though it is the responsibility of all nurses to do research to improve nursing care

Resistance to Change by Nurses:

As most nurses are resistant to progressive changes in health sector, some nurses tend

to hold onto and are more comfortable with outdated practices, are satisfied with the diploma form of education and certifications, and tend to discourage the pursuit of the Bachelor's degree education level of Nursing which is a prerequisite for Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP), without making efforts to improve and maintain new skills there might be no Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) candidates even if the implementation is considered, this to is a challenge.

Non-Participation In Policy Making :

Policy making on health issues is a major challenge affecting the implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP). From the beginning of the Nursing profession, society had deemed the nursing profession a female only profession. The nurses of the past were grossly handicapped because of the type of training they received, by taking their feminine submissive roles without questioning. Nurses have lack of political power at both national and state levels in Nigeria, being subordinates to Doctors and these has affected leadership roles in policy making on health Matters. Hence, to achieve advanced nursing practice in Nigeria, Nurses must actively involve in health care policy across broad.

Poor Media Projection of Nursing:

The mass media e.g. newspapers, radio station, and even movies do not project Nurses and Nursing profession very well to

the general public. (Sullivan-Bentz et al., 2018)

Poor Participation by Politicians:

This is a canker worm that has eroded the general system in Nigeria including nursing practice an example clearly is how the remuneration for nurses has been politicized even today. Hence, for Advanced Nursing practice to be realistic in Nigeria, leaders must see need to stop politicizing the need for advancement in nursing education in the country.

Poor Information System:

Poor information system is another cause of declining nursing services, proper planning and budgeting plus monitoring are essential information that have delayed the progress of nursing services in Nigeria. There are no realizable and accurate data in which care is planned. Information to patients is very poor. Interpersonal relationship between various professional in the hospital setting is poor and this also can cause a fall in care rendered and negative image of the professionals. Nurses need to read newspapers, journals and internet articles to be more informed about current issues in nursing services.

Overcoming these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration between government and health care sector.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The scope of Advanced Nursing Practice which has been embraced for implementation a necessity for the good and growth of the nursing profession in Nigeria. The implementation of Advanced Nursing Practice in Nigeria faces several challenges, including regulatory barriers, resistance to change by nursing professionals, resistance from other health care professionals, and limited resources for education and training. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government agencies, health care institutions, professional associations, and educational bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) should ensure the accreditation of various universities and institutions that offer nursing to create an enabling pathway to advanced nursing practice program.
2. Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) should ensure regular review of curriculum for nursing education to cover advanced nursing practice.
3. National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) should vigorously pursue legal framework geared towards promoting autonomy of advanced nursing practice.

4. Government should facilitate accreditation of training institutions by providing infrastructure, adequate manpower and teaching aids.

5. Government should provide scholarships to encourage nurses further in advanced nursing practice.

6. Nurse Leaders in clinical areas and training institution should provide mentorship for young nurses to enable them pursue advanced nursing practice.

7. Undergraduate nurses should develop interest and commitment early enough during their nursing training aimed at developing skills that will lay foundation for their nursing career and academic progression towards advanced nursing practice.

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