

## **Finland**

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In Finland, various advanced roles for registered nurses have been developed since the early 2000s. Nevertheless, the advanced practice nursing (APN) is still at a relatively early developmental phase. Advanced roles for registered nurses and task allocation have been identified as a way to improve access to health care, for instance in the situations of limited supply of physicians and in a period when elderly population is ageing rapidly. In 2016, a group of experts appointed by Finnish Nurses Association, published a report on Finnish APN roles with five central recommendations for further role development: 1) integrate nursing roles, titles and push for consequent regulation; 2) Develop advanced practice nursing education; 3) Determine the APN need and dose; 4) Ensure conformity between remuneration and level of practice; 5) Monitor APN effectiveness.

### **Critical Mass**

Various registered nurses' advanced roles, requiring master level education, have been developed since the early 2000s. However, as we do not have protected titles for these roles in Finland, it is difficult to estimate the current numbers.

There are nearly 80 000 employed registered nurses in Finland from which 324 nurses in primary health care have acquired a limited right to prescribe medicines (September 2017). Furthermore, Finnish Nurses Association (FNA) has acknowledged about 35 nurses with the Clinical Practice Nursing Certification since 2008. Currently around 80 nurses have been appointed to Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) roles (November 2017). The total number of Nurse Practitioners (NP) is more difficult to estimate. We have a network of more than 300 nurses that have received a master level education at university of applied sciences specializing in clinical practice (90 ECTS), however, we do not know how many of them work in roles that could be regarded as NP.

### **Protected Titles/Definitions**

The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) grants upon application the right to practice as a licensed or authorized professional and authorizes the use of the occupational title of healthcare professional. Under Finnish law, licensing is granted to 17 different health care professions, including those of nurse, midwife, and public health nurse.

We have not traditionally used the concept of APN in Finland, but nurses are working in various advanced clinical roles in primary health care as well as in hospitals. Finland has a long experience of cooperation and task sharing between physicians and nurses, especially in primary care centers. Most of the nurses working in different specialized or advanced clinical roles do not have a master's level education and their educational background varies. For the most part these roles are also not regulated. Furthermore compared to many other countries', registered nurses role in Finland is fairly independent. Especially in primary health settings registered nurses are often the first points of contact and have independent nurses' appointments. Finnish midwives and public health nurses have also very independent roles .

The Finnish Nursing Association has described the career ladder from Registered Nurse to Advanced Practice Nurse in 2016. The list of nursing positions that require advanced training and skills is as follows:

- **Specialized Nurses in clinical practice** have taken specialist supplementary training (30-60 ECTS=European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) in different clinical fields i.e. anesthetic nursing, diabetes nursing, family nursing, case management, pediatric nursing, mental health nursing, or gerontology, and have advanced professional roles in nursing. The curricula and professional roles are not regulated. (European Qualifications Framework [EQF] level 6)
- **Registered Nurse with Specialty Certification** awarded by the FNA. When applying the Certification, one has to demonstrate post-graduate work experience, formal post-graduate education, professional cooperation and developmental work, together worth a minimum of 200 ECTS. (EQF level not defined ~ around 6)
- **Nurse Prescriber** has been granted a limited right to prescribe medications. This role requires 45 ECTS post-graduate training. In addition the requirements include an employment relationship with the health centre and an authorization from the physician-in-charge. The aim has been to support better access to care, better utilization of nursing knowledge and skills in patient care, and flexibility of services in primary health care and emergency care. (EQF level 7)
- **Nurse Practitioner.** Requires Master's degree which provides nurses with advanced clinical competencies to work independently in clinical patient care work mainly in primary health care. Similarly to specialized Nurses, the curricula and professional roles are not regulated. Furthermore, these practitioners have varying titles and roles in working life. (EQF level 7)
- **Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS).** CNSs are mainly positioned in specialized health care at university hospitals throughout Finland, but also in some of the central hospitals and also the first ones at primary health care. The first CNSs appeared in the early 2000s, and the numbers are rising. Most of the CNSs have a university Master's degree and some of them have doctoral degree. CNSs operate in the four distinctive yet interrelated role spheres of patient care, nursing, organization, and scholarship. (EQF 7, Master's degree; or EQF 8, Doctoral degree)

### **Regulation**

National legislation closely regulates the education and professional practice of health care personnel. Nursing training in Finland is also based on the European Union's Directive 2013/55/EU amending Directive 2005/36/EC. Therefore, the requirements in Finland are similar to those of elsewhere in the European Union and other collaborating European countries.

## Education

Since the beginning of 1990s registered nurses (RNs) have been educated at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS, also called Polytechnics). Before that the education was at college level. It takes three-and-a-half years to complete bachelor level degree, which is worth 210 ECT. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECT credits that are equivalent to 15000-1800 hours of study.

The Finnish higher education system consists of two complementary sectors: Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. The mission of universities is to conduct scientific research and provide instruction and postgraduate education based on it. UASs train professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct R&D which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular. A registered nurse can apply to a university or a UAS to take a Master's level degree.

Registered nurses with Master's level degrees often tend not to work with 'hands-on' clinical, direct patient care, but for example in management and administration, research and development, education, consultation, or in health care specialist positions. Historically, the Master's degree has not provided a possibility to advance clinical career, this has thus caused talented nurses to move away from direct patient care. However, while specialty practice patterns and education have existed in Finland for decades, the education for APN roles is more recent. There is no nationally congruent APN curriculum for universities or UASs. Regulation would be one important way to move forward.

### Master's level education in University of Applied Sciences (UAS)

The requirements for studying for a Master's degree at a UAS is a Bachelors' level UAS degree and at least three years work experience. The UAS Master's degree is worth 90 ECTS and takes about one-and-a-half to two years. It is equivalent to a university master's in the labour market. The degree programs vary, for example Clinical Nursing, Emergency and Critical Care Nursing, Management in Social and Health Care, or Health Promotion. Students graduated from UASs and majoring in clinical nursing, have been employed in different positions in the labour market. We still have challenges to define and develop their independent role, their professional concept, and their positions in working life.

### Master's education in University

There are five universities in Finland offering Master's courses in nursing sciences. To enroll one needs to be a registered nurse or to have an equivalent qualification in health care. The curricula vary between the universities. For example, the Department of Nursing Science at the University of Turku offers a degree course in nursing science as a major, with clinical nursing, health care administration and management as a minor subject.

The university master's studies consist of two separate degrees, together worth 300 ECTS. The Bachelor of Nursing Science degree is a lower academic qualification (180 ECTS) and the degree Master of Nursing Science is a higher qualification (120 ECTS). Depending on their previous studies, registered nurses usually need to obtain about 80-100 ECTS for the Bachelor degree and 120 ECTS for the Master's degree, amounting in total to about 200-220 ECTS. In addition to Master's degrees, universities provide postgraduate Licentiate and Doctoral degree courses. One can also take Licentiate or Doctoral degrees after completing a Master's at a UAS.

## Prescription Authority

The aim of nurse prescription in Finland has been to support better access to care, better utilization of nursing knowledge and skills in patient care, and flexibility of services in primary health care and emergency care. Generally APNs do not have prescriptive authority in Finland. Prescriptive authority requires 45 ECTS further post-graduate training. In addition the requirements include an employment relationship with the health centre and an authorization from the physician-in-charge. Although, the education is not a masters' education, the government decree on nurse prescribing education states that the education must be delivered at university level and, like masters level education, the prescription education provides EQF level 7 knowledge, skill and competence.

The first courses started in 2010. The studies encase clinical nursing, pathology, clinical pharmacology and studies on legislation and regulations. By spring 2018 we will have about 400 registered nurses in primary health care with the limited right to prescribe medicines. The first experiences have been very positive when evaluated by nurses, patients and physicians.

## Background Reading

National Development Plan for Social and Health Care Services 2008-2011. To disseminate the advanced roles of nurses and prepare proposals for changes in legislation. [Finnish]

National Development Programme for Social Welfare and Health Care 2012-2015. To continue the dissemination and development of the redistribution of the tasks and advanced roles of nurses. [Finnish]

A report by Finnish Nurses Association's group of experts on APN roles in Finland, current state, vision, and recommendations, was published in Finnish in 2016. English translation will be published in early 2018.

## Web Links

Sairaanhoitajien uudet työkuvat - laatua tulevaisuuden sote-palveluihin. [Finnish]

<https://sairaanhoitajat.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Laajavastuinen-sairaanhoitaja-muuttaa-sote-palveluita.pdf>

Finnish Nurses Association. [English] <https://www.nurses.fi/>

## References

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Finnish Nurses Association 2014. Biennial follow up survey based on the Quality Criteria for Professional Community. Results from the year 2014. Available in Finnish at:

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Increasing the Effectiveness and Attraction of Nursing Care by Means of Management. 2009. National action plan 2009-2011. Publications of the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2009:18.

Jokiniemi K. 2014. Clinical Nurse Specialist Role in Finnish Health Care. Dissertations in Health Science. University of Eastern Finland. Available in: [http://epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn\\_isbn\\_978-952-61-1579-5/urn\\_isbn\\_978-952-61-1579-5.pdf](http://epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn_isbn_978-952-61-1579-5/urn_isbn_978-952-61-1579-5.pdf)

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Patomäki M. 2014. Advanced roles of nurses - a force in the health service reform. Presentation 18 August 2014, 8th ICN INP/APNN Conference in Helsinki.