



**WOCN**<sup>®</sup> Wound, Ostomy, and  
Contenance Nurses Society<sup>®</sup>

# **WOCN SOCIETY POSITION STATEMENT: ROLE AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR WOUND CARE PROVIDERS**





## **WOCN Society Position Statement: Role and Scope of Practice for Wound Care Providers**

**Originated By:** Wound Treatment Associate Task Force

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### **Statement of Position:**

The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society (WOCN) is a clinician-based, professional organization whose members treat individuals with wounds, ostomies, and incontinence; and are committed to cost-effective, outcome-based, health care (WOCN & Wound, Ostomy Continence Nursing Certification Board [WOCNCB], 2008). The WOCN Society is dedicated to assuring that appropriate care is available for individuals with wounds, ostomies, and incontinence; because, patients deserve health care that assists them in maximizing their functional status (WOCN & WOCNCB, 2008).

The WOCN Society recognizes that to fulfill its mission of ensuring access to quality care to patients with acute and chronic wounds, there is a need to extend education to other providers. The WOCN Society recognizes the following levels of wound care providers: wound, ostomy, and continence (WOC) specialty nurses (i.e., WOC registered nurses [baccalaureate prepared]; WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurses; WOC advanced practice registered nurses [WOCN, 2017]); and wound treatment associates. The WOCN Society endorses the appropriate utilization of each level of wound care provider.

### **Purpose (Rationale for Position):**

The primary purpose of this position statement is to clarify the roles of the different levels of wound care providers: WOC registered nurses, WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurses, WOC advanced practice registered nurses, and wound treatment associates. Brief descriptions of the role and scope of practice for each level of provider are included in this document.

### **History/Background:**

#### **WOCN Society Mission, Philosophy, Goals, and Strategic Plans**

**Mission.** “The WOCN Society is a professional nursing society, which supports its members by promoting educational, clinical and research opportunities to advance the practice

and guide the delivery of expert health care to individuals with wounds, ostomies and incontinence” (WOCN, 2016, p. 6).

**Philosophy.** The philosophy of the WOCN Society includes the following beliefs:

The WOCN Society believes that nursing as a profession enhances health care services to a multifaceted society and includes prevention, health maintenance, therapeutic intervention, and rehabilitation. Wound, ostomy and continence (WOC) nursing is an area of specialty practice within the framework of nursing that strives to advance the health care and quality of life of all affected individuals.

The WOCN Society believes that continuing education and research provide the basis for current, comprehensive nursing practice for patients with wounds, ostomies and incontinence. Learning may occur on a basic, advanced or continuing educational level and combines the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and clinical expertise. The WOCN Society provides quality continuing education for its members and for other health care professionals to enhance and improve WOC nursing practice.

By a process of accreditation, the WOCN Society promotes high standards of education and requires a minimum baccalaureate degree as the entry level for Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nursing Education Programs (WOCNEPs). WOCNEPs may provide a tri-specialty education program for wound, ostomy, and continence care and/or any of the specialty practice areas individually. (WOCN, 2016, p. 2)

**Goals.** The WOCN Society has established the following goals:

1. Provide standards of practice for the WOC nurse to ensure quality patient care services.
2. Provide continuing nursing education for the professional development of the WOC specialty nurse.
3. Represent and promote WOC specialty nursing practice to the public, to allied health care professionals, the community, and governmental groups.
4. Accredite Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Education Programs (WOCNEP).
5. Provide quality continuing education in the field of WOC specialty nursing to other health care providers.
6. Promote ongoing development of the profession and the Society through research and long-range planning activities. (WOCN, 2016, p. 8)

**Strategic plans.** The WOCN Society’s 2009 strategic plan included the following vision, goal, and objective for education (WOCN, 2009, 2011):

- **Vision.** The WOCN Society will be the premier provider of WOC nursing education.
- **Goal.** The WOCN Society will be the premier provider of education for all levels of nurses providing WOC services.

- **Objective.** Increase educational outreach/offers for nurses providing wound, ostomy, and/or continence care who do not have baccalaureate degrees, such as nurses with an associate degree or diploma and licensed practical/vocational nurses.

The strategy to meet the objective was to develop a WOCN Society endorsed, educational program for nurses who were providing wound and ostomy care and did not have a baccalaureate degree. Pursuant to the 2009 strategic plan, the WOCN Society developed a position paper to clarify the role and scope of practice for each level of wound care provider (WOCN, 2011), and a continuing education program was developed and implemented for the education of wound treatment associates.

### **WOC Nursing Specialty Scope of Practice**

WOC nursing was recognized as a specialty nursing practice in 2010 by the American Nurses Association (ANA), and the scope and standards of practice for WOC nursing were published (WOCN, 2010). The Society is currently preparing an update to the 2010 WOC nursing scope and standards of practice to maintain recognition by the ANA (WOCN, 2017). WOC specialty nurses can specialize in all three areas of WOC nursing or focus on one or more areas of specialization.

Wound, ostomy, and continence (WOC) nursing is a multi-faceted, evidence-based practice that incorporates a unique body of knowledge to enable nurses to provide excellence in prevention, health maintenance, therapeutic intervention, and rehabilitative and palliative nursing care to persons with select disorders of the gastrointestinal, genitourinary, and integumentary systems. WOC nursing directs its efforts at improving the quality of care, life, and health of healthcare consumers with wound, ostomy, and/or continence care needs (hereafter, referred to as healthcare consumers). This complex, nursing specialty encompasses the care of individuals of all ages, in all healthcare settings, and across the continuum of care.

WOC nurses influence and guide the delivery of optimal care for healthcare consumers directly through the provision of hands-on care and indirectly through their roles as educators, consultants, researchers, or administrators throughout the healthcare community. (WOCN, 2017, p. 6)

### **Current Issues and Trends**

“Major trends in the American healthcare system present endless opportunities and challenges for WOC nursing. WOC specialty practice is influenced by shifts in population demographics, legislative initiatives, and rising health care costs as well as patient safety and quality concerns” (WOCN, 2010, p. 20). WOC nurses provide care to individuals with multiple types of wounds due to pressure, venous, arterial, or neuropathic disease; trauma; surgery; and/or other disease processes such as cancer and infection (WOCN, 2017). Wounds are costly and are a large burden for society and the healthcare community. On an annual basis, wounds due to pressure affect more than 2.5 million people in the United States at a cost of \$9.1 to \$11.6 billion, and 60,000 of those individuals die (Berlowitz et al., n.d.). “Key factors that influence the outcomes for patients with acute or chronic wounds are the availability and accessibility of evidence-based, specialized

care to meet the growing need for prevention and treatment of complex wounds” (WOCN, 2017, p. 7).

As the population ages, it is expected that increasing numbers of individuals will suffer from acute and chronic wounds, which will require more healthcare providers with specialized skills to manage the wounds. In addition, there are increasing numbers of military service personnel requiring expert wound care, and there are few high level educational programs available to the Armed Services.

Therefore, there is a need to extend education to nonspecialty nursing providers who can collaborate with WOC nurses and other healthcare providers to meet the needs of individuals with acute and chronic wounds. The following recommendation provides a description of the role and scope of practice for each level of wound care provider, which includes a brief overview of the criteria and competencies for each level of provider.

## **Recommendation:**

### **Role and Scope of Practice for Wound Care Providers: WOC Registered Nurse, WOC Graduate-Level Prepared Registered Nurse, WOC Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, and Wound Treatment Associate**

**Note:** Practice limits are defined by each state. Each nurse is accountable to practice in accordance with the specific requirements of the licensing board in the state(s) in which the nurse practices.

#### **1. Criteria and competencies for the WOC registered nurse.**

- a. Education.** Minimum baccalaureate degree.
- b. Licensure.** Licensed as a registered nurse by the State Board of Nursing (SBON) in the state(s) where the nurse practices.
- c. Specialty Education/Certification.** Completion of a WOCN Society accredited educational program in wound management and/or certification by the WOCNCB in wound care (i.e., certified wound, ostomy, and continence nurse [CWOCN]; certified wound care nurse [CWCN]; certified wound and ostomy nurse [CWON]).
- d. Level of autonomy.** Functions under the guidance of a physician or advanced practice registered nurse.
- e. Selected competencies for wound care and management** (WOCN, 2017). The WOC registered nurse:
  - Provides expert hands-on care for individual patients with acute or chronic wounds (e.g., advanced treatment modalities; conservative sharp instrumental wound debridement of devitalized tissue or chemical cauterization per physician order, etc.).
  - Serves as a consultant to provide insight and potential solutions for complex clinical cases to improve patient care and outcomes.
  - Uses judgment and critical thinking skills to assess, diagnose, and identify outcomes; develop and implement an individualized care plan; and evaluate care of the patient with an acute or chronic wound.

- Uses evidence-based assessment techniques, instruments, tools, and available data and information to identify problems and needs of the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
- Collects pertinent data (e.g., biological, physical, functional, psychosocial, etc.) using a systemic process to identify the patient's needs.
- Synthesizes and prioritizes assessment data to provide focused care for the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
- Assesses the impact of family dynamics, and cultural and religious beliefs on the patient's care needs.
- Formulates culturally sensitive, expected outcomes based on the assessment and diagnosis.
- Uses evidence-based knowledge and research findings to guide practice and develop strategies/interventions to manage care to achieve appropriate goals and outcomes for patients with acute or chronic wounds.
- Assists the patient with an acute or chronic wound identify options for care.
- Conducts an ongoing evaluation of the goals and outcomes for management of the patient with an acute or chronic wound; and uses assessment data to revise/modify the diagnosis, outcomes, plans, and strategies as warranted.
- Engages the patient with an acute or chronic wound in self-care to maximize independence and achieve goals for quality of life.
- Articulates the role and responsibilities of the WOC nurse to team members.
- Leads interprofessional teams to communicate, collaborate, and consult effectively; and ensure that safe, effective, efficient, timely, patient-centered, and equitable care is provided for the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
- Coordinates care for the prevention and management of complications.
- Develops and implements evidence-based educational programs for patients, staff, and other healthcare providers.
- Evaluates processes, policies, procedures, and protocols/guidelines for care of patients with acute or chronic wounds; and recommends revisions when warranted.
- Provides leadership in the design of quality improvement initiatives to optimize outcomes of care for patients with acute or chronic wounds.
- Advocates for the patient with an acute or chronic wound (and for the specialty and professional practice) to ensure the availability and access for the patient to specialty care services, resources, and supplies including insurance coverage.
- Facilitates/coordinates use of systems and community resources to implement and enhance care of patients with acute or chronic wounds across the continuum of care.
- Engages consumer alliance and advocacy groups in health teaching and health promotion activities for patients.

2. **Criteria and competencies for the WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurse.**

*a. Education.* Master's degree or higher.

*b. Licensure.* Licensed as a registered nurse by the State Board of Nursing (SBON) in the state(s) where the nurse practices.

- c. **Specialty Education/Certification.** Completion of a WOCN Society accredited educational program in wound management and/or certification by the WOCNCB in wound care (i.e., CWOCN, CWCN, CWON).
- d. **Level of autonomy.** Has advanced knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment; functions in an advanced level as determined by the nurse's position; and is not required to have additional regulatory oversight (ANA, 2015).
- e. **Selected competencies for wound care and management** (WOCN, 2017). In addition to competencies of the WOC registered nurse, the WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurse:
  - Applies knowledge from advanced preparation, current research, and evidence when making clinical decisions to achieve optimal outcomes for the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
  - Uses available benchmarks to evaluate practice at the individual, departmental, or organizational level.
  - Uses data and theory-driven approaches to effect organizational or system changes to improve practice and outcomes for patients with acute or chronic wounds, and determine if plans are effective or need revision.
  - Critically critiques evidence from databases for applicability to practice.
  - Evaluates tools, instruments, and services for diverse populations who need care for acute or chronic wounds.
  - Designs quality improvement studies, research initiatives, and other programs to improve health care and outcomes for patients with acute or chronic wounds in diverse settings.
  - Contributes to WOC nursing knowledge and other evidence by conducting, critically appraising, or synthesizing research and other evidence to improve healthcare practices.
  - Synthesizes relevant research, empirical evidence, and frameworks when designing and implementing educational programs for patients, staff, and other healthcare providers.
  - Incorporates theories and research in generating strategies to promote health and healthy lifestyles of populations who need care for acute or chronic wounds.
  - Mentors colleagues for the acquisition of advanced clinical knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment.
  - Creates evaluation strategies to address cost effectiveness, cost benefits, clinical effectiveness, and efficiency of WOC nursing practice.
  - Analyzes outcomes, related to organizational care delivery and populations served, to make recommendations for improvements in the delivery systems for care of patients with acute or chronic wounds across care settings.

### 3. **Criteria and competencies for the WOC advanced practice registered nurse (APRN).**

#### a. **Education.**

- Master's degree or higher.
- Completion of a graduate-level educational program that is accredited by a national nursing or nursing-related accrediting body that is recognized by the Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, and

prepares the APRN in a specific role (i.e., clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse practitioner, certified registered nurse anesthetist, certified nurse-midwife) with population-focused competencies (ANA, 2015; APRN Consensus Work Group & National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN] APRN Advisory Committee, 2008; Stanley, 2012).

- b. *Licensure.*** Licensed to practice as an APRN in a specific role by the State Board of Nursing (SBON) in the state(s) where the nurse practices (ANA, 2015; APRN Consensus Work Group & the NCSBN-APRN Advisory Committee, 2008; Stanley, 2012).
- c. *Specialty Education/Certification.***

  - Completion of a WOCN Society accredited educational program in wound management and/or specialty certification or advanced practice (AP) certification by the WOCNCB in wound care (i.e., CWOCN, CWCN, CWON, CWOCN-AP, CWCN-AP, CWON-AP; WOCN, 2017).
  - Certification as an APRN by a nationally recognized certification board such as the American Nurses Credentialing Center or the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (ANA, 2015; APRN Consensus Work Group & the NCSBN-APRN Advisory Committee 2008; Stanley, 2012).
- d. *Level of autonomy.*** Functions independently or in collaboration with a physician, which is dependent on the SBON where the APRN practices.
- e. *Selected competencies for wound care and management*** (WOCN, 2017). In addition to competencies of the WOC registered nurse and WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurse, the WOC advanced practice registered nurse:

  - Serves as a provider of WOC nursing services in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations.
  - Provides consultation to patients and professionals to improve care and outcomes for patients with complex clinical cases due to acute or chronic wounds.
  - Initiates diagnostic tests and procedures relevant to the current status of the patient.
  - Formulates a differential diagnosis based on the history, physical examination, and diagnostic test results.
  - Uses advanced assessment, knowledge, and skills to make clinical decisions for care of the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
  - Develops plans of care that integrate assessment, diagnostic strategies, and therapeutic interventions; and reflect current, evidence-based knowledge, and best practice for care of patients with acute or chronic wounds.
  - Uses prescriptive authority, procedures, referrals, treatments, and therapies in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations.
  - Prescribes evidence-based pharmacological agents, treatments, supplies (e.g., topical therapies, dressings), and durable medical equipment according to clinical indicators and results of diagnostic and laboratory tests; and in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations.
  - Synthesizes evaluation data from the patient, community, population, and/or institution to determine the effectiveness of plans for attainment of goals and outcomes for the patient with an acute or chronic wound.



- Uses evaluation data to make or recommend changes in process, policy, procedures, or protocols for care when warranted.
- Defines expected outcomes that integrate evidence, best practice, and input from interprofessional team members to address cost and clinical effectiveness of care for patients with acute or chronic wounds.
- Provides leadership to promote communication and collaboration to assure safe and quality patient care.
- Engages in comparison evaluations and in partnerships with patients to determine the effectiveness of diagnostic tests, clinical procedures, therapies, and treatment plans; and optimize the health and quality of care for patients with acute or chronic wounds.

#### 4. **Criteria and competencies for the wound treatment associate.**

- a. **Education.** Minimum of a nursing diploma, associate degree, practical/vocational nurse education; or successful completion of military medic training.
- b. **Licensure.** Licensed as a registered nurse or practical nurse/vocational nurse by the SBON in the state(s) where the nurse practices. (Licensure is not required for military medics.)
- c. **Continuing Education.** Certificate of completion from a WOCN Society endorsed Wound Treatment Associate Program.
- d. **Certification.** Certification as a wound treatment associate (WTA-C) is available for nurses from the WOCNCB. Certification may be preferred or required by some employers.
- e. **Level of autonomy.** Functions under the direction of the supervising WOC specialty nurse (i.e., WOC registered nurse, WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurse, WOC advanced practice registered nurse); a physician, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner; or other qualified healthcare providers, experienced in wound care, such as a clinical nurse specialist or a certified wound specialist (CWS).
- f. **Selected competencies for wound care and management.** The wound treatment associate:
  - Collaborates with the supervising WOC specialty nurse or other healthcare provider and team members, and in accordance with established protocols:
    - Identifies patients at risk for developing pressure injury and/or wound complications.
    - Implements preventive care per established protocols and monitors skin status.
    - Implements treatment plans established by the supervising WOC specialty nurse or physician, and uses topical therapies and products as outlined in the plan.
    - Provides routine care that promotes optimal outcomes for the patient with an acute or chronic wound.
    - Provides on-going monitoring of the wound and the patient's response to the established plan to include observation and measurement of the wound.
  - Notifies the supervising WOC specialty nurse or other healthcare provider when the wound deteriorates or fails to make progress.

- Identifies patients who require referral to a WOC specialty nurse and/or other healthcare provider.
- Assists with providing individualized education to patients, caregivers, and team members regarding prevention of pressure injuries and management of wounds.
- Participates in quality improvement programs.

## **Conclusion:**

To meet the needs of individuals with acute or chronic wounds, the WOCN Society has recognized there is a need to extend education to nonspecialty nursing providers who can collaborate with WOC specialty nurses and other healthcare providers. The WOCN Society recognizes four levels of wound care providers and endorses the appropriate utilization of each level of provider (i.e., WOC registered nurse, WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurse, WOC advanced practice registered nurse, and wound treatment associate). A description of the role and scope of practice for each level of wound care provider has been developed. The description includes a brief overview of the criteria and competencies for each provider as a basis for developing and providing educational programs; and clarifying the differences in the preparation, role functions, and duties of the different providers.

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