WOC Nurse Roles

WOC nurses serve in a variety of roles including clinician, educator, consultant, researcher, and administrator; and they may engage in dual or multiple roles. Standards of professional practice and professional performance and competencies for WOC nurses, according to educational preparation and licensure (i.e., baccalaureate prepared registered nurse, graduate-level prepared registered nurse, and advanced practice registered nurse [APRN]), are defined in the section on Standards of Practice and Professional Performance for Wound, Ostomy, and Continence (WOC) Nursing.

**Clinician.** The WOC nurse provides care to individuals in multiple practice settings that include acute care, skilled nursing facilities, long-term acute care, ambulatory clinics, rehabilitation settings, home health care, or hospice care, etc. (See Figure 1 in the discussion of WOC Nurse Practice Settings). The WOC nurse may also evaluate individuals and their care via asynchronous or synchronous telehealth services. To achieve optimal outcomes, the WOC nurse uses the nursing process when caring for healthcare consumers. Each plan of care is individualized to complement the developmental age of the healthcare consumer and their caregiver and achieve the best outcomes (ANA, 2010b, 2015a).

**Educator.** Education is an integral component of every WOC nurse’s role. The WOC nurse provides education directly to healthcare consumers and caregivers, other nurses and clinical staff, and other healthcare providers. WOC nurses provide staff education through orientation, on-the-job training, in-service education, and development of protocols and/or guidelines (WOCN, 2013a).

WOC nurses may elect to serve as course coordinators for the delivery of wound care education to participants in the WOCN Society’s Wound Treatment Associate (WTA®) Program, which was launched in 2012. The WTA Program is a continuing education program developed by WOC nurses, with the support of the Society, to meet the growing need for knowledgeable, skilled wound care providers. In the WTA Program, participants are educated by WOC nurses to provide basic wound care. The WTA Program enhances, strengthens, and promotes the wound care team by educating registered and licensed practical/vocational nurses and medics/corpsmen. Registered and licensed nurses who successfully complete the program are eligible for certification by the WOCNCB as a wound treatment associate. The role of the wound treatment associate is implemented under the direction of a WOC specialty nurse or another qualified healthcare provider (WOCN, 2017a). In addition, WOC nurse members of the Society are currently developing an educational program for ostomy care associates to prepare additional nurses to assist with managing ostomy care. These educational efforts extend and expand the reach of the WOC nurse, thereby improving the quality of and access to wound and ostomy care for healthcare consumers.

WOC nurses may also provide formal education in academia or other organized continuing education programs that focus on one or more aspects of wound, ostomy, or continence care (WOCN, 2013a). Educational webinars are examples of some of the numerous continuing education programs provided by WOC nurses and the WOCN Society. These programs extend the reach of the WOC nurse and the WOCN Society to areas and settings that lack a WOC nurse. Educational webinars have been provided by WOC nurse experts to address clinical or specialty/professional practice issues such as the following sessions that are available on the WOCN Society’s continuing education website (www.prolibraries.com/wocn/?select=sessionlist&conferenceID=8):

- *Pressure Ulcer Prevention and Safe Patient Handling: Can They Be Combined?* (2015)
· **Reporting and Refining Best Practice: Medical Adhesive-Related Skin Injury (Marsi; 2015)**

· **From Hygienic Task to Preventive Intervention: Preventing and Managing Incontinence-Associated Dermatitis (2015)**

· **Collaboration between PT and WOC Nurses on Managing Risk to the Lower Extremity (2015)**

**Consultant.** In a direct consultant role, the WOC nurse partners with the healthcare consumer and other members of the healthcare team (WOCN, 2013a). The WOC specialty nurse has unique skills to coordinate individualized care based on assessment of the needs of the healthcare consumer, knowledge of current best practices, and an ongoing evaluation of the outcomes.

The WOC nurse might also be responsible for coordinating care for a specific population of healthcare consumers. Factors to consider in planning care for specific populations include current trends, best practices, development of standardized treatment and prevention plans, and refinement of plans based on the outcomes (WOCN, 2013a). “Collaboration with other healthcare providers and groups is also an essential part of the WOC nurse consultant’s role. When working in a collaborative role, the WOC nurse has the potential to increase the body of knowledge, provide a broader perspective about problems or issues, and suggest a comprehensive solution to improve the overall quality of care” (WOCN, 2013a, p. 14). Some WOC nurses serve as independent consultants with contractual arrangements for the delivery of wound, ostomy, and/or continence care services in various settings. WOC nurses may also utilize their expertise in other practice areas such as legal nurse consulting.

**Researcher.** In the role of researcher, the WOC nurse advances the science and art of wound, ostomy, and/or continence care. Varied types of research are conducted using different methodologies (e.g., applied research/clinical trials, problem-focused research, exploratory research, etc.). WOC nurse researchers are active in all settings where WOC nurses practice including academia, industry, and direct patient care areas (WOCN, 2013a). At the clinical level, WOC nurses assist in the translation of research and evidence-based guidelines into practice to enhance the delivery of quality care.

**Administrator.** The WOC nurse may also assume the role of an administrator. As an administrator, the WOC nurse’s duties and responsibilities include management and oversight of clinical staff and the delivery of services across a broad spectrum of care (WOCN, 2013a). Other activities involved in administration include program development and efforts to ensure quality outcomes.

**Dual/multiple roles.** Often WOC nurses assume dual or multiple roles, depending on their educational preparation and setting. In addition, WOC graduate-level prepared registered nurses and WOC advanced practice registered nurses contribute to the specialty and profession by examining systems, spearheading research, and providing clinical leadership in WOC nursing.