

# RPNs and Role Clarity: A Preliminary Analysis of Interprofessional Collaboration in an Inpatient Rehabilitation Hospital

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## BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Optimal patient outcomes in inpatient rehabilitation require a high level of interprofessional collaboration<sup>[1]</sup>.

Collaborative team work is essential for quality rehabilitation outcomes<sup>[2]</sup>, yet it cannot be assumed that health professionals fully understand the roles and competencies of other team members<sup>[3]</sup>.

RPNs are important team members in inpatient rehabilitative care, however, a gap in knowledge exists around RPN role clarity in interprofessional inpatient rehabilitative care teams.

This qualitative analysis explores how RPNs enact their scope of practice to support patient-centered care in inpatient rehabilitation. By examining the experiences of RPNs, unit leadership, and intra- and interprofessional team members, the study aims to identify strategies to strengthen collaborative practice and role clarity.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1 Understand the current scope of practice of the RPN in the rehabilitation setting
- 2 Identify ways in which the current RPN practice is distinct from or overlaps with other care providers
- 3 Contrast knowledge against the optimal scope of practice in the inpatient rehabilitation care setting

## HYPOTHESIS

Ambiguity exists in understanding of roles, including that of RPNs, among interprofessional team members in inpatient rehabilitation settings.

## METHODS

- 1 **Participant Recruitment**  
Participants: RPNs, unit leaders, interprofessional team members  
Recruitment: purposive and snowball sampling
- 2 **Data Collection**  
Quantitative Data: demographic data, ACE-15; SurveyMonkey  
Qualitative Data: semi-structured interviews, Zoom recordings
- 3 **Data Analyses**  
Quantitative Data: SPSS  
Qualitative Data: preliminary open coding; thematic analysis

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

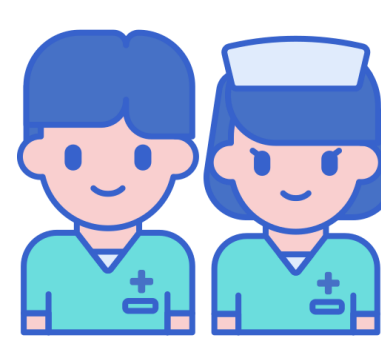
### Demographics



5  
RPNs



3  
Unit  
Leaders



4  
Interprofessional  
Team Members

### Preliminary Themes

#### Role Differentiation and Overlapping Scope of Practice



At times, lack of role differentiation stems from overlapping duties in the interprofessional team, especially when treating stable patients

*"Because I do have conceived notions about nurses and I just thought nurses and RPNs were all sort of, they're all nurses." P007*

#### Subjectivity in Patient Assignment Process



At times, there is inaccurate utilization of the RPN skillset relative to patient needs. Assignments at times lack clear guidelines for what a "stable" patient is

*"The RPN assignments change more compared to other assignments. In regards to if we come into work and there's a shortage or some discrepancy with the assignment." P012*

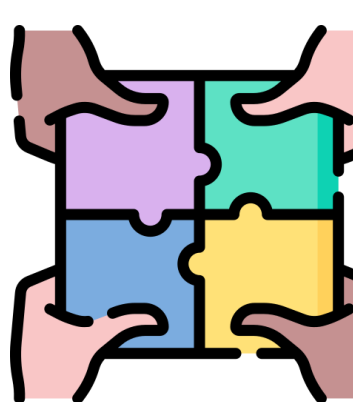
#### Confidence Anchored in Scope Awareness



RPNs are confident in their scope of work and skillset, and will seek assistance for tasks beyond their skillset (i.e., IV insertion, complex patients)

*"If I don't have the skill in administering or inserting an IV, I would go to not necessarily an RN. I would go on the unit to whoever has that skillset. So it could be an RN or an RPN. And that goes for everything that you don't have the knowledge, skill, and judgment for." P008*

#### Building Interprofessional Understanding of the RPN Role



RPNs and interprofessional team members felt education on individual roles and scope of practice would improve collaboration

*"I guess educate people, more or less. There's so much more to the RPN than just changing somebody's brief, or just washing somebody and getting them ready and giving them a pill, right?" P009*

## DISCUSSION

Role ambiguity and overlapping scopes of practice exist among interprofessional team members (inclusive of RPNs) in inpatient rehabilitation settings.

Clear criteria for patient assignments would improve alignment between patient needs and RPN (and broader interprofessional team) skills.

Knowledge development on individual roles and responsibilities recommended in interprofessional teams to support role clarity and subsequent team functioning.

Positive interprofessional relationships grounded in shared role awareness foster confidence and effective teamwork.

### Limitations

- These are preliminary findings; recruitment and analyses are ongoing
- Findings are from a self-selected cohort of participants at a single site

## NEXT STEPS

### For Research:

- Continue conducting qualitative interviews (focus: recruiting more unit leaders and team members)
- Complete quantitative and thematic analyses

### For Healthcare Organizations:

- Continue fostering interprofessional understanding of the RPN role, and clearing delineating its responsibilities

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