



ADVISORY OPINION # 57

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QUESTION: Is it within the role and scope of responsibility of the registered nurse (RN) and licensed practical nurse (LPN) to perform basic (Level I), intermediate (Level II) and advanced (Level III) foot and nail care?

The Board of Nursing for South Carolina has determined that Level I and Level II foot and nail care are within the role and scope of professional nursing practice for the LPN and RN. Level III foot and nail care can only be provided by an RN with specialized education, training and documented competency and must be ordered by a licensed independent practitioner.

Definition for Levels of Foot and Nail Care Interventions:

- Level I Foot and Nail Care: The goals are to provide hygiene, comfort, and patient education to patients with intact skin and normal circulation, sensation, and nails.
- Level II Foot and Nail Care: The goals are to educate the patient in self foot care maintenance, maintain toenails that are of normal length and thickness (by filing, trimming (clipping) or buffing), smooth hyperkeratotic lesions (corns and calluses), promote skin integrity, and prevent injuries. Level II foot and nail care includes the components of Level I care. Patients who require Level II foot and nail care have intact skin, normal circulation, long thick nails and corns or calluses. They might have impaired sensation and skin problems such as dryness, peeling, flaking, fissures, maceration, or edema.
- Level III Foot and Nail Care: The goals of Level III foot and nail care are to provide assessment, education, and interventions for special management of foot and nail complications (e.g., paring/sharp debridement of corns and calluses, debriding thick toenails, footwear recommendations) as ordered by the LIP or APRN. Patients with Level III foot and nail care needs often have impairments in function, circulation, and sensation. Level III foot and nail care does not include the care of patients with foot wounds and/or severe ischemia. This care requires advanced practice performed by LIPs or APRNs.

Level III foot and nail care includes the components of Level I and Level II foot and nail care.

Level III foot and nail care is considered an expanded role for the RN. Only an RN who has successfully completed an organized course of study on foot and nail care, including assessment and debridement techniques, should provide Level III foot and nail care. The course must include didactic classroom instruction followed by a period of supervised clinical instruction, including return demonstration and documented assessment of clinical competency.

An LPN may provide Level I and Level II foot and nail care; however, it is not within the role and scope of practice for the LPN to provide advanced foot and nail care. LPNs providing foot and nail care do so under the supervision of the RN who has first assessed (at least within 30 days) the patient's lower extremity (i.e., hygiene, circulation, sensation, skin, feet, toenails, mobility, footwear, patient understanding of foot care) to determine the level of foot and nail care needs.

Patient education regarding foot and nail care should only be provided by licensed nurses and may not be delegated to unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP). The UAP may only provide the hygiene and comfort measures associated with Level I foot and nail care.

The Board recommends that agency policy and procedures address:

- Required education, training and ongoing competency evaluation of RNs and/or LPNs performing Level II foot and nail care.
- Required education, training and ongoing competency evaluation of RNs performing Level III foot and nail care.
- Supervisory requirements for LPNs by the RN with regard to Level I and Level II care including the frequency of the RN's assessment to determine the level of foot and nail care needs.
- How the agency will assure a LIP/APRN evaluates and provides orders for patients with Level III foot and nail care needs.
- Guidelines for identification and referral of patients with high risk foot conditions (i.e., impaired circulation/ischemia, foot wounds, infection/cellulitis, specialized footwear needs, edema).

This statement is an advisory opinion of the Board of Nursing as to what constitutes competent and safe nursing practice.