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**UNIVERSITY of
COLORADO HOSPITAL'S**

*Professional Nurse Practice Model and
Program, creating*

EX

CELLENCE

in

C

LINICAL CARE

E **DUCATION,
VIDENCE**

and

L

EADERSHIP

UExcel

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INTRODUCTION

University of Colorado Hospital's focus on nursing **EX**cellence in **C**linical care, **E**ducation and **E**vidence, and **L**eadership represent UEXCEL, the Clinical Practice Program, an advancement system that promotes professional registered nurse practice at the University of Colorado Hospital.

The UEXCEL program provides the foundation for professional nursing practice at UCH, and offers the opportunity for nurses to progressively move toward advanced levels of professional practice. Each level of UEXCEL represents increased responsibility, clinical knowledge and expertise, a greater accountability to mentoring others, and an expanded role as a clinical resource for patients, families, staff and community.

The UEXCEL program was initially developed by the University of Colorado Hospital Nursing Leadership under the guidance of Joyce Cashman, RN MS MHA, who at the time was the Vice President of Nursing. The program's theoretical framework is derived from Patricia Benner's work, *From Novice to Expert* (1984), based on the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition. This theory describes the stages a nurse experiences moving from the new graduate to more expert clinical practice. Dr. Benner views nursing practice as a journey in professional development over time, with growth and change occurring throughout the professional nurse's career. As the nurse grows professionally, he or she may choose the level of commitment matching career goals and individual preferences.

UEXCEL is linked directly to the University of Colorado Performance Management Program. The standards used to guide professional nursing practice also evaluate nurse performance. Each of the four levels of UEXCEL have specific criteria of practice that represent four different levels of expertise, and include the components of practice, leadership, outcomes and profile. The standards of care, practice and performance for each level guide practice, evaluate practice and credential the nurse for the level of performance. UEXCEL provides an opportunity for promotion while retaining the clinical nurse in the role of direct care provider. UEXCEL provides a complete program to promote professional nurse practice. The UEXCEL conceptual model is shown as follows:



MISSION STATEMENT

University of Colorado Hospital believes patient outcomes are improved when care is delivered by a professional nurse workforce that is highly skilled, motivated towards continued learning, committed to the mission and goals of the hospital, and dedicated to furthering the profession of nursing. These professional attributes are enhanced by a practice environment that includes a strong practice model such as UEXCEL.

UEXCEL has as its mission to provide a system for clinical advancement that permits registered nurse career progression while encouraging the nurse to remain in a clinical position delivering direct patient care. University of Colorado Hospital registered nurses believe UEXCEL enhances professional autonomy and accountability, increases nurse expertise, and promotes professional development within the ethical framework of the American Nurses Association Code of Nursing. Each nurse is encouraged to pursue the highest level of career achievement desired.

UEXCEL strives to promote a professional registered nurse practice environment that is flexible and supportive of the career decisions of nurses, recognizes nurses' individual talents, and encourages the development of these unique contributions. By providing uniform standards and criteria for practice across clinical services, the model promotes best nursing practices, supports contributions to practice, education, leadership and research, and empowers professional practice to ensure high standards of excellent nursing care for patients.

UExcel PROGRAM GOALS

- ◆ To create an environment that promotes professionalism in nurse actions and attitudes toward peers, patients and other disciplines.
- ◆ To define the expectations and levels of professional nurse practice from novice to expert, incorporating the dimensions of leadership, practice, outcomes and profile.
- ◆ To provide a framework for credentialing and evaluating professional registered nurses, integrated with UCH's Human Resources Performance Management Program.
- ◆ To provide a system for compensation and rewards commensurate with level of professional nurse practice.
- ◆ To provide opportunities for professional development and career advancement, to promote job satisfaction, improved practice outcomes, and enhance recruitment and retention of professional nurses at University of Colorado Hospital.

UExcel PRACTICE ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

LEVEL I

The level I professional registered nurse is an entry level **Advanced Beginner** nurse who has graduated from an accredited baccalaureate or advanced level entry into practice program. The Level I UExcel nurse is responsible for mastering the knowledge and skills necessary for competent Level II nursing practice within one year of beginning employment at University of Colorado Hospital. The Level I nurse is a participant of the Post-Baccalaureate Nurse Residency Program.

LEVEL II

The level II professional registered nurse is an experienced clinician who is **Competent** to care for complex patients. The Level II nurse demonstrates the ability to work collaboratively on the healthcare team, incorporate research and continuing education into practice, and participates on the team to improve the quality of care in the designated clinical area. Level II RNs also include clinical nurses who are completing their first year of practice as members of the Post-Baccalaureate Residency Program.

LEVEL III

The professional registered nurse is an **Advanced, Proficient** nurse who demonstrates advanced knowledge and skill caring for complex patients and is a recognized leader in the clinical area. The level III nurse takes an active role in contributing to improved patient outcomes, education and management. The Level III nurse functions as a leader primarily within the designated unit or clinical area, although may participate in professional activities extending within the hospital and to the external environment.

LEVEL IV

The Level IV registered professional nurse demonstrates **Expert** clinical skills and is regarded as a clinical authority and resource both within the unit as well as the hospital. The Level IV clinical nurse assumes a significant degree of responsibility and leadership for education, outcomes and management in addition to practice, and acts as a mentor and resource to others. The Level IV professional nurse is active and contributes professionally beyond the hospital environment to the community.

UExcel PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Standards and Categories of Practice

Standards of care, practice and performance are organized into four categories: Practice, Outcomes, Leadership and Professional Profile. UExcel standards are based on national standards from the American Nurses Association. Performance standards may incorporate specialty standards per clinical area, such as published by the Oncology Nurses Society (ONS), American Association of Ambulatory Nurses (AAAN), or the Association of Operating Room Nurses (AORN). Each level of UExcel has identified standards in all four dimensions of practice that must be met by nurse performance. Nurses receive a copy of the standards during orientation. A copy of the standards may be viewed on the Professional Resources Website: <http://www.uch.edu/for-healthcare-professional/professional-resources/uexcel/uexcel-evaluation-tools.aspx>.

EVALUATION USING UExcel STANDARDS

University of Colorado Hospital evaluates professional registered nurses yearly based on the UExcel standards, within the framework of the policies and procedures of the UCH Human Resources Performance Management Program. There are UExcel appraisals for each level of RN clinical nurse. This evaluation tool includes a development plan section, the contract for flexible weights, and scoring grid used to calculate the performance rating at the time of evaluation. Newly hired nurses are evaluated on completion of orientation as well as at the time of the hospital's annual appraisal period.

PEER REVIEW

Peer review is an integral part of the UEXCEL program, for University of Colorado Hospital believes peer review to be one of the characteristics of a profession. At UCH, nurse peers conduct record reviews of documented nursing care delivery, complete peer review forms as a part of the yearly performance appraisal, and on many unit/clinics, nurses may contribute face to face feedback on peer performance at the time of the yearly evaluation.

UEXCEL CREDENTIALING PROCEDURES

Level I

Newly employed new graduate nurses beginning employment at University of Colorado Hospitals area are assigned Level I placement. Level I nurses are evaluated at midpoint of orientation, using UEXCEL Level I performance standards. At the close of orientation, or at such time as the new nurse has exceeded Level I standards, the Level I nurse is reevaluated and then credentialed to Level II in Human Resources' Personnel Management Software System. A copy of the evaluation is sent to Human Resources. The UEXCEL Board secretary is notified and generates a Level II pin and Magnet pin. The pins are awarded at a staff meeting by the clinical area's UEXCEL Board representative, and the Manager/Director. The Level I nurse must be credentialed to Level II within one year of hire date.

Level II

Experienced professional registered nurses who are hired at University of Colorado Hospital are maintained on conditional employment until successful completion of orientation and demonstration of meeting Level II expectations at the hospital. At the time of successful completion of these steps, an evaluation is conducted, a copy sent to Human Resources, and notification sent to the UEXCEL Board secretary requesting a pin. The Level II pin and Magnet pin is awarded at a staff meeting by the clinical area's UEXCEL Board representative and the Manager/Director.

Level III and Level IV

Advancement to Level III and Level IV takes place once per fiscal year cycle, and must be done sequentially from Level II to Level III, then Level III to Level IV. Nurses cannot skip levels, since the theoretical framework describes a specific progression of advancement based on development as a professional nurse. The nurse interested in advancement applies by declaration of intent to advance, attends a workshop to learn how to construct a professional portfolio, then submits a Portfolio notebook for UEXCEL Board review and decision regarding credentials. The information submitted in the portfolio relates to nurse achievements in the areas of practice (as shown by a copy of the performance evaluation), leadership on unit/clinical projects, staff education, research outcomes, contributions to policy and procedure or standards development and by a clinical exemplar. Portfolios must include letters of recommendation, and documentation of enrollment in a baccalaureate nursing program if this degree has not been completed. Specific information regarding advancement credentialing requirements are published in the spring each fiscal year, along with application deadlines. The portfolios are submitted in December post yearly performance evaluation. Notebooks are reviewed by the UEXCEL Board in January, then applicants are notified. Advancement into Levels III and IV are recognized at Nurses Week ceremonies, including a special breakfast and photo published in the *Insider*.