

# Advanced Practice Nurse in acute hospital palliative care unit: Implementation of a new nursing role



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## Background

There is increasing evidence of Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) roles' effectiveness in improving the quality of care delivered to patients. This role is being established throughout Switzerland, but within our local context it is not yet fully known, especially in the palliative care settings.

## Aim and objectives

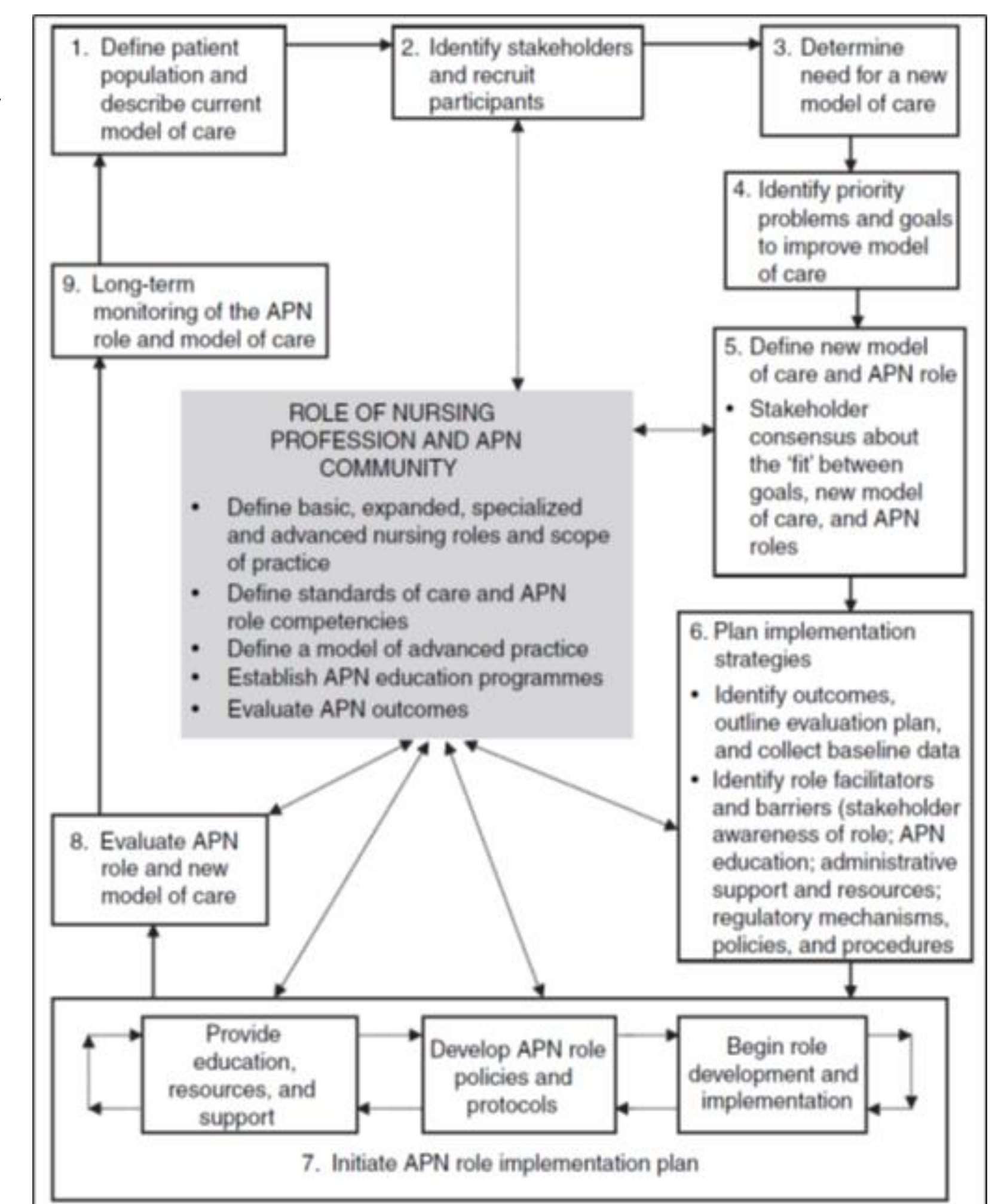
The aim of this project was to implement the APN role at the Palliative and Supportive Care inpatient unit in Lugano.

## Methods

This was a study with a parallel convergent mixed-method design, in which the first 6 phases of the *Participatory, Evidence-Based, Patient-Focused Process for Advanced Practice* framework (PEPPA framework) were used to develop the APN role and guide its implementation within the inpatient unit.

After an initial literature review, the needs of patients admitted to the ward from January to June 2022 were collected and analysed (*phase 1*). Subsequently, main stakeholders were identified within the interprofessional clinical team and the palliative care management team (*phase 2*). Their needs and expectations regarding the new role were explored via Focus Groups and semi-structured interviews; a thematic analysis was then conducted using NVivo12<sup>®</sup> (*phases 3 and 4*).

A consensus meeting with the direction team was then held to define the new role's scope of practice and the new model of care. The management team also agreed upon the new role's activities, responsibilities and implementation strategies (*phases 5 and 6*).



PEPPA framework (Bryant-Lukosius & DiCenso, 2004)

## Results

Patient data	Total
Patients admitted to the inpatient unit	77
Age (mean ± DS)	70,3 (±12,9)
Length of stay (median and [Q1; Q3])	11 [7; 16]
Barthel Index (mean ± DS)	63,6 (± 29,7)
Charlson Comorbidity Index (mean ± DS)	8,8 (9 ± 2,2)
Palliative Performance Scale (mean ± DS)	57,8% (± 22,4)
<b>Palliative Prognostic Score</b>	
A	25
B	35
C	17
Patients known to PC service prior to admission	32
Patients with Advanced Directives on admission	8
Discharged patients (to home or health facilities)	47
Deaths	30
IPOS forms completed (Patient version: last 3 days)	57
<b>Main patients' symptoms and concerns</b>	
Pain	41
Weakness	49
Poor mobility	46
Anxiety	36
Depression	30
Concerns for own family/caregivers	52
Practical and/or economical problems	22
Information about illness/therapies	23

Data collected from January to June 2022 to help define patient population

**Phase 1:** The 77 patients who were admitted to the inpatient unit in the selected period showed a reduced physical function with limited prognosis and a moderate comorbidity. Patients expressed a range of complex physical, psycho-social and spiritual needs by completing the Integrated Palliative care Outcome Scale (IPOS). Although 32 of them were already known to a palliative care service, none was assisted by an APN. Most patients were discharged, mainly to their homes.

**Phases 2-4:** The identified main stakeholders were five nurses, a doctor, four members of the interprofessional team, three members of the management team and the entire palliative care management team. Two Focus Groups and four semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their views about the APN role: 10 themes emerged, grouped into 3 macro-themes. Although the role wasn't fully known to everyone, the APN's scope of practice and its competencies were seen as an answer to the patients' and team's needs. Participants stated that the APN could support patients and their caregivers throughout their clinical pathway, as well as help the interprofessional team make complex clinical decisions. The participants also identified some influencing factors regarding the implementation process, underlining the importance of the early involvement of the main stakeholders.

Macro-themes	Themes
APN role	Definition & Characteristics
	Expectations & Needs
	Competencies
Implementation process	Scope of practice & Activities
	Facilitating factors
	Impeding factors
	Strategies
Inter-professionality	Organisational aspects
	Resources
	Risks

Thematic analysis from Focus Groups and interviews

## Phases 5 and 6:

A consensus about the new APN role and its scope of practice was reached by the direction team, based upon the previous phases' results. The new model of care and the role's responsibilities were also defined: the APN will deliver nursing care, especially to clinically unstable palliative care patients with complex needs and will support the interprofessional team in delivering their care to said patients, which includes staff education. Initial APN care outcomes were also identified, but the implementation process could lead to further adaptations. Additionally, the main planned implementation strategies were to gradually introduce the role within our clinical context and to involve all the members of the interprofessional team throughout the entire implementation phase.

## Conclusion

The APN role was recognized by the main stakeholders as an answer to both the patients' and the team's complex needs. The new role's scope of practice and activities were defined, but the actual implementation at the inpatient unit in Lugano will be subject to a final decision from the hospital management.