Registered Nurse Scope of Practice Laws

Prepared by the Policy Surveillance Program Staff

SUMMARY

This map identifies variations in state laws that govern the scope of practice for registered nurses (RNs). Specifically, it addresses what activities RNs are authorized to perform, whether they are authorized to delegate medical activities to other health care professionals, what activities they can and cannot delegate, who the RNs can delegate to, and what level of supervision is required for this delegation.

ABOUT REGISTERED NURSE SCOPE OF PRACTICE LAWS & THE DATA

Registered nurses (RNs) in the United States are licensed health care professionals who can perform a variety of medical activities, such as formulating nursing care plans, performing nursing diagnoses, counselling patients, making referrals to specialists, or administering medication. RNs can supervise and delegate activities to other professionals, such as licensed practical nurses, unlicensed assistive personnel, and nursing students.

Every state in the United States has a nurse practice act that regulates the scope of practice for RNs. The law governing RNs is typically structured differently from the law governing advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). APRNs are RNs who have specialized to perform more complex medical tasks. The law typically requires APRNs to practice under the supervision of a physician due to the complexity of the tasks they are performing. On the other hand, RN laws tend to delineate activities that RNs can perform generally, as well as medical activities that RNs are authorized to delegate. Although some states require RNs to practice under the supervision of a physician, that supervision is not detailed with the same depth as physician supervision of APRNs. Therefore, this dataset focuses primarily on the general scope of practice of registered nurses, as well as how RN delegation functions, rather than on the specific requirements for the various types of APRNs, like nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, or nurse anesthesiologists. As physicians begin to specialize more and more, there will be an increased need for primary care in the United States that may be provided by RNs.

The data available here was last updated with laws in effect through August 1, 2015.

Some findings from the dataset include:

- Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia allow registered nurses to perform a nursing diagnosis.
- Twenty-eight states allow registered nurses to delegate medical activities to licensed practical nurses.
Seventeen states and the District of Columbia require registered nurses to provide continuous supervision to the health care professionals they delegate to.

**NAVIGATING THE DATA**

There are two ways to navigate the data by clicking the Filter tab or the Explore tab — for each option, the data can be visualized in a map and table format or in jurisdiction profiles.

**Filter**

The dataset homepage will default to the Filter tab. Here, users may answer a series of questions to learn more about the characteristics of the laws. Answering more than one question will show all the jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria. Criteria selected will be listed above the questions, and can be removed by clicking the white X or by clicking “Reset” above the questions.

**Explore**

Users can access Explore by clicking the Explore tab in the bar above the questions. Using Explore, users will see the answers to one question across all jurisdictions.

The primary questions in this dataset are:

1. What medical activities are included in a registered nurse's scope of practice?
2. Does the law authorize registered nurses to delegate medical activities to other health care professionals?

**DISPLAYING THE RESULTS**

There are two display modes once criteria have been selected by using either the Filter or Explore tab — **Map display mode** and **Profiles display mode**.

**Map Display**

LawAtlas.org dataset homepages default to the map display mode. When querying the data using the Filter tab, all jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will display in one tone of yellow. Those jurisdictions that do not meet the criteria selected will be colored gray. When querying the data using the Explore tab, the map will illuminate with colors from yellow to red that are associated with the various answer choices (the color-coding is defined by the key to the left of the map).

Below the map, a table will appear. Using the Filter or Explore tab to navigate the questions will change the display:

- Using the Filter tab, you can select an unlimited number of criteria and the applicable jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria will be displayed in the table below.
- Using the Explore tab, you can isolate a single criterion and the applicable jurisdictions will appear in the table below.

**Profiles Display**

The Profiles display presents the results of the criteria selected in a text-based format for each applicable jurisdiction. Using the Filter tab, jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will
display. Using the Explore tab, jurisdictions that meet the criterion selected will display. If no criteria are selected, the full profiles for each state will appear under both Filter and Explore.

Profile Legend
Within each Profile box, above the questions and answers, there are additional options and information useful in exploring the law:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toggle Legal Text – Selecting this option will show all the legal text used to answer questions for this jurisdiction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toggle Full Place Profile – Selecting this option will show all questions and answers for this jurisdiction, regardless of what was selected using the Filter or Explore tabs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toggle Size – Selecting this option will make the profile larger, but will not change the information displayed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legal Text History – This interactive timeline displays when changes in the law have occurred within a jurisdiction. Using the arrows to the left or right, users may explore how the law has changed over time as new amendments to the law have been enacted. The timeline will change from gray to a shade of yellow when the jurisdiction passed its first relevant law. Each change in the law after that is marked by a break in the timeline.

Map and Profile Legend
There are a few symbols to be aware of in both Map and Profiles display modes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>Section Symbol – Clicking this symbol will open a window that displays excerpts from the law that correspond to the question and answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>Caution Note – Clicking on this symbol will open a small window that displays text that describes important caveats about the question and answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DATASET RESOURCES
Each dataset homepage includes the following resources available for download:

- Data: The Data file exports in CSV. format and may contain two tabs. The “Statistical Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset, displayed as values defined in the accompanying Codebook. The “Summary Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset in text form, as well as the accompanying citations and any caution
notes that may be included. Note: if there is only one tab available for download it will be the “Statistical Data” as described above.

- **Codebook:** The Codebook defines all of the coded variables in the dataset. The Codebook lists the question, question type, variable name, variable value and variable label. The Codebook should be used in conjunction with the Statistical Data extract.

- **Research Protocol:** The Research Protocol is a comprehensive document that outlines the entire methodology of the project, including the scope, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection methods, definitions, coding scheme decisions, as well as the quality control process.

- **Summary Report:** The Summary Report provides a snapshot of important findings from the dataset.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- For more information about registered nurse scope of practice and related laws, please visit the [National Council of State Boards of Nursing](https://www.ncsbn.org).

This collection of laws does not provide legal advice nor does it address enforcement of laws, administrative policies, case law, or any other sources of law. Should you have a specific question about these laws in your state, please contact an attorney in your jurisdiction.