DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL CARE NURSES:

ENHANCED OR ADVANCED PRACTICE?

A TRIANGULATED STUDY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EVIDENCE

Restorative Justice for All International Institute

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND, IMPETUS AND METHODOLOGY:

This e-book serves as the conclusive documentation, encapsulating the entire trajectory of our study, which commenced in phase 1 with desk research, progressed through original fieldwork, and culminated in the triangulation stage. In this final phase, our aim is to address the research questions and hypotheses posed. Each of these sequential phases constitutes a part of a broader programme led by the Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy (BHSCA), in collaboration with the RJ4All International Institute and Bucks New University (BNU). The overarching objective of this programme was to investigate the necessity for a framework facilitating advanced and enhanced levels of nursing practice particularly within social care settings, along with identifying any existing gaps or missing elements. To this end, it was imperative to comprehend the specific capabilities essential for advanced and enhanced nursing practice within social care, and to elucidate the nature, demands, and benefits associated with such practices. Subsequently, we aimed to explore how advanced and enhanced social care nursing practices can seamlessly integrate into a career progression pathway for social care nurses and delineate the requisite training requirements.

The primary focus of the project lies within the realm of social care, aiming to examine the significance of advanced and enhanced nursing roles within this context, particularly when juxtaposed with the more clearly defined clinical care found in acute health settings. The overarching hypothesis of the programme asserts that the evolving nature of the social care system requires the integration of both enhanced and advanced nursing skills, coupled with the development of structured career progression routes. It is necessary to delve deeper into these capabilities, providing a comprehensive description and definition, in order to elucidate the benefits associated with the utilisation of enhanced and/or advanced social care nursing roles.

The overall programme's research objectives were:

- To describe the current opportunities that exist for the employment of enhanced and advanced social care for nurses across a range of settings (e.g. in domiciliary care, for older persons and within intellectual disability services.
- To outline the competencies required for both enhanced and advanced social care nursing practitioners.
- To evidence how enhanced and advanced social care nursing practice could be integrated successfully into a career progressional pathway for social care nurses. If so, what would the career pathway look like?

The The overarching research programme consisted of three distinct phases. Phase 1 entailed extensive desk-based research aimed at establishing a foundational understanding of existing knowledge, serving as the baseline for subsequent investigations. Phase 2 was built upon the key insights derived from phase 1 and involved original fieldwork employing qualitative research methods. These methods encompassed 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups. The first focus group (nurses/nursing background) had 6 participants while the second one (employers/training providers) consisted of 8 participants. The sample was identified during the phase 1 of the programme:

1. Frontline practitioners, namely registered nurses working in social care settings.
2. Employers in the social care sector.
3. Educational and training providers, offering programmes of advanced or enhanced level of practice.

Following phase 2, phase 3, which is the focus of this report, undertakes triangulation of findings from both secondary and primary research by juxtaposing results across phases and consulting 4 key stakeholders from BHSCA and BNU including also the analysis of an online survey which was shared far and wide amongst previous interviewees, practitioners in the field and other associated professionals. This report comes to conclude all three phases of this programme.

All stages of this comprehensive programme adhered to UK and international research ethics standards. Where applicable, research ethics approval was diligently sought. Additionally, sensitive data was safeguarded in accordance with UK Data Protection legislation and the European Commission's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

KEY OVERALL FINDINGS:

The key overarching findings following the completion of the triangulation process within this research programme can be summarised as follows:

- **Lack of attention in social compared to acute healthcare:** The study revealed a troubling lack of attention and investment in the social care sector compared to acute healthcare, resulting in neglected person-centred care. Throughout all three phases of the project, it became clear that social care nursing roles often took a backseat to those in acute healthcare. This situation was closely associated with various other identified gaps (mentioned below), such as the lack of standardised definitions for advanced and enhanced levels of practice, financial limitations, inadequate educational provisions tailored to the needs of social care, etc. This neglect has perpetuated a cycle of uncertainty and ambiguity. Stakeholders emphasised the need to prioritise the development of the social care sector as it can be used to take some of the burden that acute healthcare currently faces.

- **Lack of clarity in defining enhanced and advanced practice in social care:** The study uncovered a widespread lack of clarity in defining enhanced and advanced levels of practice and the respective capabilities particularly in social care settings, reflecting broader issues of neglect and underinvestment in the sector. According to the research, advanced practitioners should have research capabilities and strategic service management understanding, while enhanced practitioners should manage clinical complexity and implement evidence-based practices. Overall, these intense levels of practice should include clinical assessment, medication management, and medical care coordination, while leadership and communication skills were also highly valued. Despite this glimpse into defining capabilities, survey responses and interviews revealed that currently there is a prevalent misunderstanding of the differences between these roles, particularly among frontline practitioners, with leaders demonstrating clearer comprehension. This confusion underscores the urgent need for clear distinctions between enhanced and advanced practice levels. Further collaboration and research are needed to establish clearer role distinctions and skill requirements.

- **Lack of clarity in career development and progression pathways:** The study revealed significant ambiguity regarding professional development pathways, with unclear career advancement steps and sporadic pay increases, if any. In contrast to the standardised pathways in acute healthcare settings, the social care sector features completely non-standardised roles, tasks, and remuneration, leading to feelings of disorientation and discouragement among practitioners. Thus, it is crucial not only to clarify role descriptions and capabilities as mentioned above, but also to address limitations in career progression and ensure professional recognition comparable to other healthcare professions.

- **Enhanced and advanced social care nursing faces regulatory challenges:** The research highlighted significant regulatory challenges regarding enhanced and advanced social care nursing. Firstly, our findings underscored a consensus among stakeholders regarding the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities at each practice level and therefore having separate frameworks regulating advanced and enhanced level of practice. Secondly, moving on to the question of existing frameworks, our research pointed out the inadequacy of existing frameworks, such as the Advanced Clinical Practice Framework by Health Education England, in addressing the unique needs of social care settings. Despite receiving mixed messages, ranging from advocating for a separate framework solely dedicated to social care to suggesting adjustments to existing frameworks to include social care, the overarching message remains consistent: any adaptation must prioritise the public interest in patient safety. Acknowledging the unique challenges of social care nursing ensures effective and proportionate regulatory interventions for safe and high-quality care delivery.

- **Lack of funding, educational gaps and infrastructural challenges are evident obstacles in social care nursing:** The study brought attention to critical challenges facing social care nursing, including funding shortages, educational gaps, and infrastructural hurdles. Participants emphasised funding shortages as the primary obstacle, followed by educational deficiencies and the lack of social care placements in nursing education curricula. These gaps not only hinder the sector's potential but also fail to inform undergraduate students about its opportunities. In addition to the regulatory weaknesses mentioned earlier, employers provide inadequate infrastructure support, leading to challenges in balancing work and training life. Limited avenues focused on social care exacerbate accessibility constraints in the training pipeline, alongside financial burdens within social care settings. Bridging these gaps necessitates concerted efforts to align funding, education, and infrastructure with the unique needs of social care nursing, thereby ensuring a coherent career pathway and optimal care provision.

- **Positive outcomes are evident after the application of enhanced and advanced social care nursing roles:** The synthesis of findings from the triangulation process in phase 3 revealed positive outcomes from implementing advanced levels of practice in social care nursing, including reduced hospital admissions through advanced care in residential settings. Enhanced communication and proactive strategies build trust among residents and families, improving safety and quality of life. These practitioners contribute to more efficient service delivery and support workforce development. Overall, advanced practice enhances patient care, ensures workforce sustainability, and promotes collaborative knowledge exchange in the social care system.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS:

1. Clarity in defining and standardising enhanced and advanced levels of practice in social care nursing and equity in attention between acute healthcare and social care: Equal attention and clarity are crucial missing elements currently within social care. It is imperative to clearly define advanced and enhanced levels of practice in social care nursing to foster a cohesive and progressive professional landscape. Collaboration among stakeholders, including policymakers, regulators, educators, and practitioners, is necessary to develop comprehensive guidelines outlining the required capabilities and responsibilities for each level of practice for social care nurses. Additionally, standardising job titles, role descriptions, performance metrics and pay scales is essential for clarity and consistency across the sector.

2. Creation of clear career pathways and professional recognition: In addition to standardising roles and requirements, it is essential to establish clear career pathways for social care nurses, outlining predetermined professional steps and recognising nurses' contributions. Collaboration between healthcare institutions and regulatory bodies is necessary to develop structured career progression pathways that meet both the needs of nurses and the population they serve. This involves defining explicit steps for career advancement and transparent criteria for promotion. Recognising nurses' expertise through salary increases encourages ongoing learning and boosts job satisfaction. Ultimately, investing in workforce development attracts and retains talented individuals, leading to improved health outcomes and quality of life for people throughout the UK.

3. Adaptation and development of inclusive regulatory frameworks: In addressing the evolving landscape of social care nursing, adaptable and inclusive regulatory frameworks are crucial to meet the sector's diverse needs. Insights from all phases highlight the necessity to enhance existing structures, supporting practitioners across various practice levels and integrating social care seamlessly. Our research did not favour a specific regulatory path, with some participants preferring separate frameworks for social and acute healthcare, while others advocated for a unified approach with inclusive language and regulation. Regardless, our study stressed prioritising population needs and ensuring equitable support and social care integration.

4. Addressing funding challenges should also be prioritised: Throughout this research project and through all three phases the issue regarding funding challenges in social care has been highlighted numerous times, and it should not be ignored. By fixing the regulatory issues we can also aim towards more specific funding to address the needs and gaps of the social care sector that has been constantly underfunded. Furthermore, the study outlined the potential advantages of simultaneously considering

both national and regional funding streams, tailored to meet the needs of employers.

5. Strategic utilisation of current positive examples using advanced and enhanced practice: The strategic use of positive examples of enhanced and advanced nursing practice, is pivotal for fostering professional growth and achieving a professional shift. Acute healthcare institutions and stakeholders can lead by promoting the integration of these practices in social care settings. Real-life success stories showcase the transformative impact of advanced capabilities, inspiring confidence and momentum for change. For instance, integrating nurse prescribers into social care teams enhances service delivery and optimises resource utilisation. These examples highlight the feasibility and benefits of advanced nursing practice while emphasising the importance of ongoing education and skill development.

6. Mentality and strategic shift from specialised secondary care to more accessible primary care: It is crucial to change public perception regarding the crucial role of social care within the healthcare system. Educating the public about the invaluable contributions and potential impact of social care, with the involvement of organisations like the NMC and other key stakeholders in healthcare, is essential for gaining widespread support for its prioritisation and adequate funding. Additionally, leaders in primary care settings should emphasise, invest in, and prioritise enhanced and advanced practices within primary care settings over secondary care, capitalising on existing research that underscores the significant advantages of delivering care closer to patients' homes. The healthcare sector needs to move away from distant and cumbersome specialised secondary care towards accessible primary care provided closer to home. This shift can not only improve access to healthcare services but also enhance patient outcomes and the cost-effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

7. Addressing infrastructural deficiencies and educational gaps: Finally, it is crucial to address infrastructural deficiencies and educational gaps to empower social care nurses and promote professional growth. Our research has highlighted significant challenges such as limited access to training programmes, difficulties balancing work and training due to insufficient support from employers, and inadequate educational resources tailored to social care training. These barriers hinder recruitment, retention, and overall development within the field. To overcome these obstacles, healthcare stakeholders and decision-makers must invest in infrastructure and resources that facilitate ongoing education and skill development, providing solid financial, emotional, and practical support from employers. This involves improving access to training programmes tailored to social care demands, establishing mentorship and support networks, incorporating feedback mechanisms and integrating social care placements into nursing education curricula.

6. Creating Clear Career Pathways and Recognition: Healthcare institutions and regulatory bodies should collaborate to establish clear career pathways for social care nurses, defining explicit steps for advancement and ensuring corresponding pay rises. Addressing these issues can enhance the fulfilment and retention of social care nurses, benefiting patient care and the UK healthcare system.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACP - Advanced Clinical Practice

APN - Advanced Practice Nurses

BHSCA - Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy

BNU - Buckinghamshire New University

GP - General Practitioner

HEE - Health Education England

NHS - National Health Service

NMC - Nursing and Midwifery Council

RN – Registered Nurse

SPQ - Standards of Proficiency for Community Nursing Specialty Practice

INTRODUCTION

I Background and rationale of the project

This study represents the culmination of a three-phase programme aimed at devising a framework for advanced and/or enhanced practice for nurses in social care settings. As highlighted in the preceding reports, the urgency for such a framework is evident, considering the dynamic nature of health and social care and the escalating demands of the population, aiming to alleviate the strain on the NHS and transition the emphasis from secondary to primary. With health conditions becoming more complex and the scope of care expanding, there is a growing consensus on the necessity of a refined framework to delineate advanced and enhanced nursing competencies.

While both the health and social care sectors require attention, this study focuses primarily on the social care sector, which has historically received inadequate support and is often misunderstood. Throughout all three stages of this study, the majority of participants consistently underscored that the advantages and potential of social care fail to align with the everyday realities experienced by practitioners in their work environments. Despite recognising the theoretical benefits, practitioners encounter numerous challenges and discrepancies in their day-to-day professional lives, indicating a significant gap between idealised conceptions and practical implementation within the field of social care. Against this backdrop, the urgency of developing a sophisticated framework for advanced and/or enhanced practice in social care settings cannot be overstated.

Drawing on the insights gathered during the initial phase of desk research and the subsequent phase 2 report, which involved in-depth interviews with industry professionals and focus groups, this comprehensive report consolidates the findings from both phases. Additionally, feedback from interviews with staff from BHSCA and BNU and the results of an online survey distributed among professionals have been incorporated, enriching the analysis and providing valuable perspectives on the subject matter.

II Project hypothesis and overall research objectives

We argue that the evolving landscape of social care necessitates the utilisation of both enhanced and advanced nursing skills, underscoring the need for a robust career progression framework for registered nurses (RNs). This research aims to contribute to the refinement of social care nurses' practices by providing a clearer understanding of the available opportunities across various settings, including domiciliary care, care for older persons, and intellectual disability services. Additionally, it aims to delineate the necessary capabilities for practitioners operating at enhanced and advanced levels within these settings.

Ultimately, the project aims to serve as a guiding framework for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and regulatory bodies, enabling them to address the workforce development needs of social care employers effectively. By facilitating the seamless integration of enhanced/advanced social care nursing practices into a progressive career pathway, the project aims to enhance the quality of care provided and support the professional development of social care nurses. This in turn should benefit the entire health system in the UK.

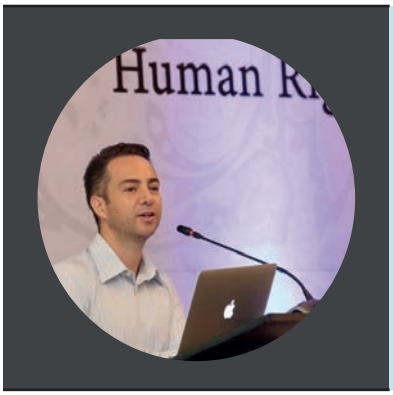
III Purpose and structure of this report

This overarching study builds upon the findings of the initial desk research, which outlined the demands and benefits associated with each level of practice for social care nurses, as well as the workforce and professional development needs within the social care sector. Phase two of this research project involved conducting 13 one-on-one interviews with professionals representing various facets of social care nursing, laying the groundwork for subsequent focus groups. These interviews offered a nuanced exploration of sector challenges, opportunities, and expectations. Subsequently, 14 participants were divided into two focus groups (6 and 8 individuals in each group): one composed of nurses and professionals with nursing backgrounds, and the other including employers and training providers. Moving on to the final phase 3 of this study, the project concludes with the triangulation of results in three main ways: first, through the consolidation of findings from the two previous reports (Phase 1 and Phase 2 interim reports); second, through feedback obtained from 4 BNU staff

members during 30-minute online meetings via Microsoft Teams; and third, through analysis of the results of an online survey, which garnered 171 responses in total.

The following sections of this report comprise a comprehensive examination of the project methodology, limitations, and overarching findings derived from the previous two phases, BHSCA and BNU meetings, and online survey results. Beginning with a recap and synthesis of the findings and recommendations of the previous two reports and phases of the project, the report delves into key themes, challenges, and opportunities identified by stakeholders and existing literature, with a particular emphasis on advancing nursing practice within the social care sector. Subsequently, a key-points section includes all the insights and feedback from the four interviews conducted with staff from BHSCA and BNU, and a survey results section provides further information from the survey. By synthesising insights from diverse stakeholders, this final report aims to inform future collaborative efforts geared towards empowering nurses to effectively address the evolving needs of diverse patient populations and communities within the social care sector.

ANNEX I:
ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

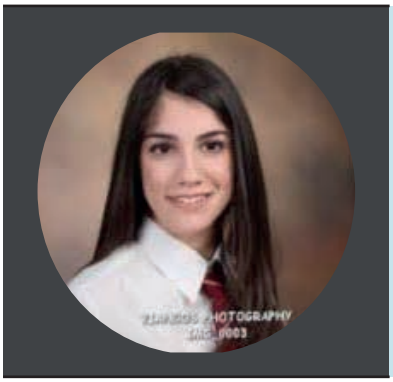


Dr. Theo Gavrielides

Professor and expert in health equalities and human rights, harm prevention and criminal law, restorative justice, violent radicalisation and youth policy. Barrister and recipient of **The Liberty of the Old Metropolitan Borough of Bermondsey Civic Award 2021**. Founder and Director of the **Restorative Justice for All International Institute.** Founder of **The IARS International Institute**. Editor-in-Chief of the peer reviewed **International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare**, **Youth Voice Journal** and the **Internet Journal of Restorative Justice**. Founder of **RJ4All Publications** and **RJ4All Sports**. Pioneer of user-led research methods, and advisor to the European Commission, and governments. He has published extensively in peer reviewed journals, and edited monographs, edited collections and special journal issues.

Sofia Sideridou

Senior social sciences researcher and a qualified lawyer. Currently working as a Research Assistant for Professor Theo Gavrielides. Previously, she was a Youth Ambassador for the Right to Peace for Greece and a legal researcher for Centre For African Justice, Peace and Human Rights. She has a Master of Laws (LLM) from Maastricht University and Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She has worked on multiple Erasmus+ research projects and is training to be a restorative justice practitioner.



Marianna Iosif

Enthusiastic and motivated Biomedical Sciences graduate from the University of Sussex and a current Postgraduate student at the University of Sussex studying Genetic manipulation and Molecular cell biology. Marianna is open to work in entry - level roles such as: Laboratory assistant, Medical/Scientific writer etc. in order to apply the broad knowledge of her undergraduate and postgraduate degree offered. She is particularly interested in genetics and any form of molecular biology. She is also really interested in cancer research. Key skills include: Cell culture techniques, Immunofluorescence staining/Fluorescent microscopy, Gel Electrophoresis, Western Blotting, Simplifying and communicating complex scientific concepts, Critical Writing, Communication.

THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SERIES

CATALOGUE

This is the third ebook in a series of three publications that form part of a larger programme that was conducted in October 2023 – April 2024. The programme aimed to develop a framework for advanced or enhanced practice in nursing in social care settings in the United Kingdom. To this end, there is a need to understand the competencies required for enhanced and advanced nursing practice in social care, and to articulate the training that is currently on offer for nursing staff working in social care settings. The overall programme hypothesis is that the evolving social care system requires the deployment of both enhanced and advanced nursing competencies and the creation of career grade opportunities; such competencies require further description and definition to demonstrate the benefits of employing enhanced and/or advanced social care nurses. The research of the overall programme is structured around three phases. Phase 1 involved comprehensive desk-based research to establish a baseline for subsequent investigations. Phase 2 was based on original fieldwork that involved 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and 2 semi-structured focus groups. The first focus group (nurses/ nursing background) had 6 participants while the second one (employers/ training providers) consisted of 8 participants. Following phase 2 and 3, this ebook undertakes triangulation of findings from both secondary and primary research by juxtaposing results across phases and consulting 4 key stakeholders from BHSCA and BNU including also the analysis of an online survey which was completed by 171 practitioners and educators.

"This final e-book in the series is the culmination of a research journey around the potential of Advanced and Enhanced levels of practice for registered nurses within social care settings, providing a scientifically proven conclusion. It is impressive to note the significant participation in the online survey, which validated the research results and identified the necessary steps to elevate social care nursing. Through the collaboration of numerous participants, the research team has not only triangulated the results but also accurately addressed the initial research questions regarding the potential development of a framework for advanced and enhanced practice. This e-book stands as a testament to the sector's commitment to advancing the practice of social care nursing."

Juliet Anderson, Director, Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy

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