

**Prof. Dra. Mª Pilar Peláez Alba.**

Technical Specialist, Directorate General for Assistance Programs of the Canary Islands Health Service.  
Escuela Universitaria de Enfermería Nuestra Señora de Candelaria (Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain).



# Advanced Practice Nursing in Diabetes, the Situation in Our Environment

**D**iabetes is a chronic (lifelong) and complex disease that can affect people of all types, ages, and conditions. It impacts all aspects of life—family, school, work, social, etc.—requiring daily lifestyle adjustments (1).

The World Health Organization defines **therapeutic education in diabetes** (2) as a continuous and multidisciplinary process, globally led by nurses who have acquired knowledge and skills in the clinical field of diabetes and have also trained in communication, motivation, and negotiation.

Education through Structured Programs underpins the entire treatment of diabetes mellitus: healthy eating, regular physical exercise, treatment self-management, oral and injectable pharmacology, management of complications, and use of technology. Studies conducted in Spain, SED and SED2 (3), demonstrate how these therapeutic education programs in adults improve clinical outcomes, treatment satisfaction, and reduce healthcare pressure. They also ensure proper control and enhance the quality of life in pediatric populations. The DAWN2 study showed the need for people with diabetes to access structured education with healthcare professionals specially trained in diabetes (4).

### DIABETES EDUCATOR NURSE OR ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE IN DIABETES?

The nursing profession has evolved, expanding its roles from care to research, teaching, and more. In Spain, the transition from Nursing *Diploma to Nursing Degree* occurred in 2010, marking a significant change as the degree now allows access to postgraduate university education such as Master's and Doctorate programs.

Therapeutic education in diabetes has also transformed with the advent of complex treatments, demonstrating their efficacy. Diabetes educator nurses have had to pursue further training to adequately care for people with diabetes.

Since 2009, the Ministry of Health has gradually been developing nursing specialties. By 2024, the specialty called Medical-Surgical Nursing Care, which would include the diabetes *educator nurse*, is still pending implementation.

Some hospitals and autonomous communities have addressed this delay by creating the necessary figure of **Advanced Practice Nurses** (APN) in diabetes. However, this

has been done inconsistently, with varying models, requirements, and proposals. This results in recognition as APNs in some hospitals or regions but not in others, failing to secure their positions.

### WHAT IS AN ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE?

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) (5) defines an Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) as: *"A registered nurse who has acquired an expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills, and clinical competencies for expanded practice. The characteristics of this practice are shaped by the context or country in which the nurse is credentialed to practice. A Master's level postgraduate degree is recommended as an entry-level qualification."*

### WHO IS AN APN IN SPAIN?

Following the ICN international model, defining which professionals are APNs in Spain is complex due to the limited availability of Master's programs until recently. Various Spanish universities have recently started offering Master's degrees in diabetes, diabetic education, advanced practice nursing, and related areas. Validated questionnaires have also been developed to identify whether nurses possess the competencies or qualities necessary to be APNs.

Initial doubts included: are only nurses who have completed a Master's considered APNs? Are specialists or those with doctoral degrees APNs? What about those with extensive training and experience in diabetes and education? It is clear that not all nurses dedicated to diabetes are APNs. To qualify, nurses must demonstrate multiple complex and advanced skills beyond those of generalist nurses, including:

- Comprehensive Clinical Care Based on Evidence
- Expert judgment with professional autonomy.
- Clinical, educational, and consulting leadership.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
- Demonstrating teaching or training of other healthcare professionals. »

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DEFINES THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION IN DIABETES AS A CONTINUOUS AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROCESS, GLOBALLY LED BY NURSES WHO HAVE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE CLINICAL FIELD OF DIABETES, AS WELL AS TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION, MOTIVATION, AND NEGOTIATION



- » • Research.
- Care management and clinical safety.

### STEPS TAKEN IN SPAIN TO CREATE AN APN IN THE MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH DIABETES, FAMILIES, AND CAREGIVERS

**2011:** The Spanish Diabetes Federation (FEDE) sought to standardize Therapeutic Education in Diabetes in collaboration with Scientific Societies and Professional Associations.

**2014:** The Spanish Diabetes Society endorsed the academic profile of nursing professionals as experts/specialists in diabetes through Master's or postgraduate university studies, highlighting the need for continuous training (6).

**2015:** The Spanish Diabetes Federation, together with the Spanish Diabetes So-

ciety, requested an accreditation for high-quality Therapeutic Education in Diabetes through public administrations.

A significant milestone was the publication of Royal Decree 639/2015, which regulates Accreditation Diplomas and Advanced Accreditation Diplomas issued by public health care administrations. These diplomas certify that health care professionals have achieved the competencies (knowledge and skills) and continuous training requirements established in a specific functional area. They are official, valid nationwide, and have a 5-year validity.

To develop this Accreditation Diploma in Diabetes, the Therapeutic Education Commission was established in 2017. It included individuals with diabetes (FEDE), the General Nursing Council (CGE), nurses who are members of the Spanish Diabetes Society (SED), and the Community Nursing Association (AEC). Its initial objective was to create a quality and safety reference framework, culminating in the 2020 publication of

the "Competency Framework for Nurses Specialized in the Care and Therapeutic Education of People with Diabetes, Families, and Caregivers" (7). This document defines the minimum training requirements for expert nurses in diabetes care and therapeutic education.

**2018:** The General Nursing Council (CGE) issued Resolution 13/2018, regulating nursing practice in the field of care and therapeutic education.

### PROPOSAL TO THE SPANISH MINISTRY OF HEALTH FOR THE CREATION OF AN ACCREDITATION DIPLOMA

To unify the status of APNs nationwide, the Human Resources Commission of the National Health System has developed a protocol for requesting Accreditation Diplomas. The request can be submitted to the Commission for Continuing Education of Health care Professions from an Autonomous Community (among other avenues) with the support of profes-

<b>Phase 1</b>	Justification	Professional and organizational needs, technological developments, quality, and patient safety.
	Definition	Title defining the functional area and the competencies to be acquired.
<b>Phase 2</b>	Differentiation	Key distinguishing elements of the functional area.
	Delimitation	Health care professions eligible to access and obtain the corresponding Accreditation Diploma and Advanced Accreditation Diploma.
	Description	Detailed explanation of competency domains, procedures, and techniques within the functional area.

**TABLE 1.** Proposal for the Creation of an Accreditation Diploma

» nals and scientific societies. The proposal must consist of 5 sections in 2 phases (Table 1).

In October 2022, the Therapeutic Education Commission was expanded to submit the “Request for the Implementation of the Accreditation Diploma for Health care Professionals in the Management and Education of People with Diabetes, Families, and Caregivers” to the National Commission for Continuing Education of Health care Professions. This proposal was presented on behalf of nurses from 9 different scientific societies and 5 Autonomous Communities in Spain, as well as the General Nursing Council and FEDE. This corresponds to Phase 1 of the proposal.

## WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE?

The Ministry’s Commission for Continuing Education has recently prioritized the creation of this Accreditation Diploma. However, it remains necessary

for the Ministry of Health to expand the Commission by creating a multidisciplinary group that includes other professions related to the management and education of people with diabetes, such as medicine and psychology. This multidisciplinary group would be responsible for developing Phase 2, which involves differentiating this functional area, defining the professions eligible to access it, and describing their specific competencies, both unique and shared, within this functional area. It is also essential to determine the requirements professionals must meet to obtain accreditation. Once Phase 2 is completed, the Commission for Continuing Education of the National Health System will draft the proposal for the creation of the corresponding diploma, which will be submitted to the Plenary Session of the Human Resources Commission and subsequently forwarded to the Interterritorial Council of the National Health System for its implementation nationwide. **D**

## CONCLUSIONS

“The APN addresses an unmet need: the demand from people with diabetes for the professional regulation of those dedicated to therapeutic education in diabetes.”

“It is important to identify which nurses possess the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively care for and educate people with diabetes and their support network.”

“It is urgent to achieve national recognition for APNs specializing in diabetes education. This recognition would secure the positions of current professionals and unify the training and acknowledgment of future ones. The only viable pathway is through the Accreditation Diploma.”

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