Professional Clinical Ladder Program Application
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Dear Applicant:

We are pleased that you have chosen to apply for a position on the Professional Clinical Ladder Program. A checklist is enclosed which lists the elements of a complete portfolio. The Committee Evaluation is located on the nursing web portal to assist you in three ways: 1) to help determine your level of practice; 2) to help determine if you have addressed all of the domains when preparing your portfolio; and 3) to make notes to assist you in your interview or when discussing your practice with your coach or manager.

All of the material you submit will be handled in a strictly confidential manner. Your application will be reviewed by five members of the Professional Clinical Ladder Committee. Review of your packet will include an audit of your practice and an interview with selected Committee members. All parts of your portfolio should be submitted in one complete package (a total of six copies) to the Professional Clinical Ladder Program Committee secretary, Helen Long, in room H7102.

You are strongly encouraged to select a coach from the approved coaches list. These individuals can assist you in the development of your application material. They have participated in a workshop to best enable you to succeed in your application process.

The Professional Clinical Ladder Program Committee meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Your application must be received by the third Wednesday of the month to facilitate review and scheduling of your interview. The Professional Clinical Ladder Program Manual is available on the Infonet. The manual contains samples of a letter of intent to apply, a curriculum vitae, narratives, letters of reference, and other helpful information.

We would like to take this opportunity to commend you for seeking to enhance your professional status and to wish you success in your endeavor.

Sincerely,

The Professional Clinical Ladder Program Committee
PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM

New Applicant Process

1. **You must first choose a coach.** A qualified coach is a designated person from the list of coaches on Coaches Corner, on the Clinical Ladder Web page.

2. The following items must be submitted as your application:
   a. A completed demographic profile (included in this packet).
   b. A letter of intent identifying the level for which you are applying, the reasons you believe you are qualified for that level, and a summary of your strengths and values within your particular level of practice.
   c. A current resume or curriculum vitae from your current unit at Hershey Medical Center.
   d. A minimum of two narratives reflective of your clinical practice on your current unit (within a year). These must be in writing.
   e. Three letters of recommendation:
      i. One from the Nursing leadership team in your unit.
      ii. One from a Nursing peer of your choice.
      iii. One from anyone you believe can best speak to your level of clinical practice.  
         *(Note: your coach may not write a letter of recommendation for you.)*
   f. If necessary to address domains of practice, additional supporting data may be submitted, i.e. letters from patients or their family, letters from peers, any documentation representing your practice that you would like to share with the committee.

3. The documentation listed in #2, a-f, must be submitted in its entirety.
   a. Six copies of the entire application must be submitted to Helen Long, room H7102.
   b. The portfolio must reach the Professional Clinical Ladder Committee’s secretary before the third Wednesday of the month **PRIOR** to the month you wish to be reviewed by the Committee. The Committee meets and receives assigned applications on the fourth Wednesday of every month. If items are missing from your portfolio, you will be notified and your application held pending completion. Due to the increased demands on the committee, applicants cannot be guaranteed to be interviewed in the next month. The committee will make every effort to review your application within two months.
   c. You will be contacted via email with the date and time of your interview.

4. For your convenience, samples of documents are available on the website.

5. **PLEASE NOTE:** If you have been placed on a Performance Improvement Plan by your leadership team, you are not eligible to apply to the Clinical Ladder until 12 months after the successful completion of the Performance Improvement Plan.
Getting Started…

- Speak to your nurse manager about your plans to apply to the Clinical Ladder and the specific level.
- Select a coach from the approved list. Contact your coach about a time to meet.
- They will advise you on the specifics which include:
  1. Writing clinical narratives.
  2. Identifying which criteria are evident in narratives and which need to be further developed.
  3. Identifying individuals to write reference letters. Ask individuals to address specific domains not yet addressed in your packet. General statements do not identify how you meet the criteria.

Reference letters need to include specific examples such as:

As one who works with many new nurses, I especially appreciate his efforts and contributions. One evening, I witnessed B. standing near the nurses’ station where several inexperienced staff were discussing a patient care issue. B. calmly interceded, providing answers regarding a complex nursing intervention.

Graduate nurses have told me “L. helped me to see the big picture. He showed me how to think about discharge needs and to question the overall plan.” Last summer the graduate nurse assigned to him was not successful passing boards initially and had to be assigned as an extern for some additional weeks. She asked to stay with L. because she felt that she was really learning a great deal with his guidance.

D. assisted me in presenting several classes for the RN Refresher Course. She prepared a formal presentation on respiratory assessment, which was very well done, thorough and creative. The RNs in the class found her clinical examples most helpful. She was able to provide encouragement to them concerning their own career paths. It was extremely encouraging to these returning RNs to see another woman balancing work, family and school!
Professional Clinical Ladder Application Process

1. Review process including characteristics of each level
   - Schedule time with manager to discuss your current practice

2. Obtain application packet
   - Recruit coach/have initial meeting to review narratives.
   - Write one or two draft narratives.
   - Complete required narratives
   - Discuss domains present in narratives; identifying those not evident
   - Solicit reference letters, add supporting data, or write additional narratives
   - Write letter of intent
   - Review entire packet with coach to assure accurate reflection of your practice
   - Make six copies

3. Submit completed application packets to Clinical Ladder secretary by the third Wednesday of the month
   - The review team is assigned
   - An email will be sent acknowledging receipt of packet, notifying of interview date, time, and location, and notifying of audit
   - Interview occurs

4. Decision reached by Committee
   - Chairperson meets with applicant regarding decision and provides feedback
   - Approved
   - Not approved
   - May request appeal process
Dear Applicant:

Please complete the following demographic information and return this page as part of your completed portfolio:

Employee Number: ___________________  Unit Name & Extension: ________________________

Manager’s Name: _____________________  Mail Code: _____  Email Address:______________

Name: ____________________________________________________________________________

Last      First      M.I.

Home Address: ____________________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: ____________________________

Current Level on Clinical Ladder (if applicable): ___________  Date appointed: ________________

Years of RN Experience: ________________  Initial Date of Hire as RN at HMC: ________________

Years Employed on Current Unit: _________  Highest Degree: _________________________________

Certifications (list all): ________________________________________________________________

Certification in area of practice (provide copy) ____________________________________________

Professional Organization (provide copy) ________________________________________________

Status: _____ Full-time _____ Part-time   Current Shift: ___________

Number of Hours Worked Per Pay Period: ___________  Number of Hours Hired to Work: ___________

Coach: ______________________________________________________________________________

Signature: _______________________________  Date: __________________________
PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM

How to Write a Narrative

Patricia Benner, Ph.D., R.N., believes that evaluation of practice is best done through narratives because they describe the practice within a context. The quality of care delivered is best judged with knowledge of the circumstances surrounding that care. The goal of a narrative is to articulate and visualize nursing practice.

With that in mind, the following dialogue was developed to assist you in writing your own narratives:

What is a clinical narrative?

A clinical narrative is a written statement of actual nursing practice. It is a story of how you provided care for a patient and family. This could be how you prepared a patient and/or family for something that changed their lifestyle when they return home, i.e. an amputation. Or it could be how you helped a young couple prepare for the eventual death of their two-year-old with leukemia. Your narrative is the story of a patient care situation that is meaningful to you. One that may have caused you to reflect on your practice, may continue to influence your practice as you confront similar situations, is a good example of the kind of care you deliver routinely, or it may be an example of how your care made a difference in the outcome for a particular patient/family. You might say that you have grown in your professional practice as a result of this experience; that the relationship and interventions you shared reinforced what you already believed.

What is the purpose of a clinical narrative?

Simply stated, the purpose of a clinical narrative is to articulate nursing and to make your practice visible. The purpose is also to see the growth and development you have made over time. It assists you in reflecting on your practice.

What should I write about my practice?

Often nurses are not aware of their contributions to the care of the patient and family, or that there may have been more they could have done or other ways a situation could have been handled.

By writing about an experience and sharing it with your peers, you can see your own growth as a professional. You also receive direction for broadening your clinical practice. Writing about your clinical practice helps you reflect on that practice and relate experience to patient care situations in the future. It also brings to light the skills you currently possess.
How do I begin to write this clinical narrative?

Think of your most recent group of patients (maybe a primary patient). What did you do that you remember? This can be a patient that you cared for yesterday, last week, or within the past year. How did you interact with this patient? Your narrative does not have to be one that involved a life-threatening situation. Choose one that involves your relationship with a patient and family. What did you and the patient plan for his/her care? Why did you make certain choices? Write as though you are trying to have someone understand your practice.

If I write a narrative about how my practice had an impact on the patient's care that means I use the word "I," right?

It must be a first-person narrative. It is always difficult to write about oneself. To describe your practice, you have to think in terms of yourself. You are the one who made the difference, so talk about it and use the word "I."

So I have selected a patient who I am going to talk about, now what?

Sit down in a quiet place and write your story:

1. Set the scene for the story -- let the reader visualize your patient and the situation. Write one or two paragraphs opening the scene.
2. Involve yourself early on in this scene.
3. Tell what you did, what you thought about, and why you made the choices you did. Write two or three sentences. The assessment should be on-going, based on feedback during the intervention with the patient and family.
4. As with any story, there is a beginning and an end. The reader should know what happened as a result of your intervention, and what this whole experience means to your practice or says to you about your practice.

As you proceed with the story, talk about your role with this patient, your assessment of the care that was needed, the care you gave (your intervention), how you involved the patient and family, and the advocacy role you played with this patient. Include the reason(s) for the choices you made. What was your thought process? Talk about how you mobilized resources or extended your intervention outside the hospital. As you write the narrative, you will realize how your care influenced the patient's outcome.
To Whom It May Concern:

I am currently applying for a Level III / IV on the Clinical Ladder and I am requesting that you write one of my Letters of Recommendation. I am asking you to specifically address Domain(s) ___________ in your letter and please site specific examples. The criteria for the clinical ladder can be found on the Nursing Web Portal. I would appreciate it if you could return the letter to me by ____________, so I could complete my application packet. Thank you so much for your time. I really do value your opinion.

Sincerely,

Domains:

1) The Caring Role
2) Teaching and Coaching
3) Clinical Practice
4) Monitoring and Ensuring the Quality of Health-Care Practices
5) Professional Collaboration and Consultation
6) Clinical Knowledge Development
**PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM**

**Promotion Description on Levels of Practice**

Promotion on the Professional Clinical Ladder is based on the demonstration of clinical expertise in the following domains:

**Domain 1: The Caring Role**  
**Domain 2: Teaching and Coaching**  
**Domain 3: Clinical Practice**  
**Domain 4: Monitoring and Ensuring the Quality of Health-Care Practices**  
**Domain 5: Professional Collaboration and Consultation**  
**Domain 6: Clinical Knowledge Development.**

Within these six domains, four broad areas of skill are addressed: affective, behavioral, technical, and cognitive. Characteristics at higher levels of the program encompass those at lower levels, i.e., in order to demonstrate the characteristics at the higher level, the lower-level characteristics are already demonstrated.

The application process consists of three integrated components: application portfolio, audit, and interview. All three components are interrelated and complement each other to present a picture of the whole practice. Evidence for each domain should be covered within these components. The old adage applies: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

**Eligibility Criteria:**

- FTE of .5 or greater (non-exempt)
- Staff R.N.s in direct patient care positions
- R.N. successfully passed probation and completed orientation
- Minimum of 2 years nursing experience
PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM

Applicant Checklist for the Professional Clinical Ladder
(For personal use only)

A total of six copies of your portfolio must be submitted to the Professional Clinical Ladder Program secretary by the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Each copy must contain the items listed below:

- Completed demographic profile
- A letter of intent that includes the level of your application
- Current resume or curriculum vitae
- Two or more narratives which reflects your current clinical assignment:
  - One
  - Two
  - Three

- Three or more letters of reference or recommendation:
  - One from the Nursing leadership group
  - One from a Nursing peer of your choice
  - One from anyone you believe can best speak to your current level of clinical practice (patient, patient’s family, another peer, or leadership person)

NOTE: Your coach may not write a letter of recommendation for you.

- Additional supporting data with a cover letter referencing the data to the domain being addressed.
- Coach’s name
- Copy of Membership to Professional Organization and/or certification in area of practice
PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM

Selection Process

After your completed portfolio is received by the committee chair, you will be assigned to a five-member review team. The goal of the team is to gain an understanding of your current clinical practice based on the three components: the portfolio, the audit, and the interview. The team has one month to complete the review. Each team consists of a chairperson, audit person and three other members.

1. The portfolio is individually reviewed by team members. Members suggest areas of focus for the audit.

2. Audit of practice is complete. This may include direct observation, interview of peers and leadership staff, a review of individual Quality Improvement data and documentation.

3. The applicant is interviewed. You need to be prepared to discuss your current practice. You will be notified of the date for your interview in the letter of acknowledgement. Your manager will also receive notification to assist with any scheduling conflicts.

4. The chairperson meets with the applicant to discuss the outcomes and provides feedback to the applicant regarding their practice.

5. A letter of recognition is presented to the successful applicant. If successful, you may use the title appropriate for your level (Level III – Nurse Clinician III; Level IV – Nurse Clinician IV). You will receive a pin from the Professional Clinical Ladder Program Committee to designate your level. Financial compensation for Level III is $4,000 and Level IV is $5,000 per year and will be evenly distributed per pay check.

6. If your application process is unsuccessful, an appeals process is available (see Appeals Process link). Whether or not you choose to appeal, you are invited to reapply after one year after the committee’s final decision.
PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL LADDER PROGRAM

Renewal Process

Following acceptance at Level III or IV on the Professional Clinical Ladder the renewal process will be part of your annual evaluation. The characteristic criteria of your particular level will be attached to the hospital evaluation tool. You must maintain 90% of the characteristics of your practice level in order to be renewed at that level each year. This will be determined, in part, from input by self, peer and management evaluations.

- **LEVEL III AND LEVEL IV MUST BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT/ ACTIVE RESOURCE OF A UNIT/DEPARTMENT/HOSPITAL COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE**
  - A person need not be physically present at a unit council meeting in order to be an active member. Conference calls, web cams, and emails from home are all alternatives. As long as the clinical ladder member is an active resource in the current unit council projects and agenda items, they will fulfill their clinical ladder requirement.

- **LEVEL III AND LEVEL IV MUST BE A MEMBER OF A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION RELATED TO CURRENT PRACTICE**

- **LEVEL IV MUST FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IN THE CHARGE NURSE ROLE**
  - In the event that a member or applicants work area does not utilize the charge role, the member must be able to demonstrate alternative leadership actions within their units.

- **LEVEL IV MUST BE CERTIFIED IN THEIR FIELD OF PRACTICE**

The leadership team will contact you at your mid-year evaluation if they have concerns about whether you are maintaining your level of practice. Together you will create an action plan to facilitate maintaining your current level.

In the event of a denial to renew at your current level, you may submit an appeal (see Appeals Process). Management teams must notify the Professional Clinical Ladder Committee chairperson of any members that are not practicing at their current level or exemplifying professional behavior.

**PLEASE NOTE: ANY CLINICAL LADDER MEMBER LEVEL III OR IV THAT IS PLACED ON A PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (PIP) WILL HAVE THEIR CLINICAL LADDER COMPENSATION SUSPENDED FOR THE DURATION OF THE PIP. IF THE MEMBER SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE PIP AS PER LEADERSHIP EVALUATION, THE COMPENSATION WILL BE REINSTATED.**
Evaluation Guidelines

To all Clinical Ladder Members:
In response to the 2011 PEP/evaluation period, the Clinical Ladder Committee has developed some guidelines to follow when completing your PEP. These guidelines were created in order to assist the committee in evaluating the current practice of all Clinical Ladder members.

CLINICAL LADDER RENEWAL PROCESS (LEVEL III AND LEVEL IV)

- All level III and IV nurses on the clinical ladder will continue to renew their status on an annual basis
- It is the expectation of all level III and level IV nurses to complete their annual self evaluation within their annual PEP tool
- Failure to complete the self evaluation will result in loss of your clinical ladder status beginning with the 2012 PEP season
- Members must provide a score as well as specific examples as evidence for each of the criteria; minimal responses will be considered incomplete
- It is the expectation of all Clinical Ladder members to have at least 2 Peer Reviews. It is the responsibility of the member to choose peers that they trust to complete the process. If your leadership team informs you that your peer reviews have not been completed, members are encouraged to choose alternate peers.
- Remember that when completing peer evaluations, please provide comments and encourage your co-workers to do the same
- Committee members will evaluate the clinical ladder criteria within the PEP at the close of the PEP.
- The outcome of your evaluation review will be communicated to each member via email after the evaluation period has ended
- Please contact Maggie Felmlee, Chair, Clinical Ladder Committee with any questions at mfelmlee@hmc.psu.edu
TRANSFERRING UNITS & INTERIM POSITIONS

The Clinical Ladder Committee has revised the current policy in regards to RNs on the Clinical Ladder transferring positions within the institution. These changes are **EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2012.**

If a Level III or Level IV Nurse Clinician **chooses** to transfer positions within the institution, their Clinical Ladder status will be temporarily suspended. The member will still hold the title of Nurse Clinician III or IV, but their financial compensation will be suspended for a period of up to 12 months. Once the member feels that they have returned to their previous level of practice in their new unit, they will be able to re-establish their compensation after the following steps:

- Notify the committee (within 12 months) when ready to reestablish their clinical ladder status
- Obtain check list from manager signed for leadership approval confirming level of practice
- Submit current resume
- Submit cover letter justifying or defending reestablishment of their clinical ladder status

After notifying the committee and submitting the requirements, an audit of practice will be conducted on the new unit by a committee member. Following the audit, an interview will be held with an interview team from the committee to determine if the member continues to meet the domains of the previous level.

**Please note, if the member fails to notify the Clinical Ladder Committee within 12 months of their desire to reestablish their clinical ladder status, they will forfeit their status, and will have to reapply completely if they choose at a later date.**

If a Level III or IV Nurse Clinician transfers their position within the institution based solely on re-alignment or integration of units, their pay will not be suspended. Those members will still be required to submit the check list from their new leadership within 12 months of their transfer confirming their level of practice. Again, if the member fails to submit this checklist, they will forfeit their clinical ladder status and will have to re-apply completely if they choose at a later date.
PLEASE NOTE: ANY CLINICAL LADDER MEMBER, LEVEL III OR LEVEL IV, WHO STEPS INTO AN INTERIM CLINICAL HEAD NURSE POSITION WILL HAVE THEIR CLINICAL LADDER COMPENSATION SUSPENDED FOR THE PERIOD OF THE INTERIM ROLE. IF THE MEMBER RETURNS TO THEIR PREVIOUS STAFF NURSE ROLE, THE COMPENSATION WILL BE RESTARTED AT THAT TIME.