Frequently Asked Questions
Clinical Supervision

**What is Clinical Supervision?**

Clinical supervision is a formal structured process of professional support and learning where two or more nurses meet to reflect and review clinical situations. Clinical supervision aims to support nurses develop knowledge, skills, competence and capabilities, accept responsibility for their own practice, and enhance safe and effective person centred care in complex clinical situations.

**Who should receive clinical supervision?**

All registered practitioners (nurses, doctors, midwives, social workers) who work in clinical settings need clinical supervision to retain their skills and expertise in practice, to safeguard accountability and to assist their personal and professional growth and development.

**Why do nurses need clinical supervision?**

Nurses work in health care settings that are frequently becoming more complex and demanding of everyone. Some nurses experience professional isolation as they may be the only health worker in their area. They also frequently work with complex cases and have to make critical decisions and judgements without the support of colleagues. Support from colleagues is not always possible or built in support network is not part of the nursing culture. Therefore the support for nurses is often opportunistic, for example, like chatting in the tea room with another nurse or over lunch break with colleagues. While these encounters may or may not be helpful they do not provide nurses with any sustained support for their professional practice.

**How is clinical supervision different from line management?**

Line management is part of a manager’s role to oversee and ensure the staff in their area works according to the policies and guidelines set out by the organisation. This role may involve meeting with a worker to discuss aspects of their work and/ or to discuss clinical, administrative or governance issues, appraisal of the worker’s practice within the context of their role.

Clinical supervision is a contracted agreement between a nurse for example who has completed training in clinical supervision with another nurse to provide support for him/ her to develop knowledge and skills about their practice in a safe reflective space. Clinical supervision is an on-going
process with regular meetings either monthly or weekly depending on the terms negotiated between the supervisee and the supervisor. Clinical supervision is not assessment or peer performance process. It is about providing a safe protected space to reflect on the nurse’s professional growth and development.

**Are there any guidelines and policies for clinical supervision for nurses working in acute general hospital settings?**

Not at present. Individual hospitals and managers offer different forms of support. This support may include mentorship, coaching, supervised practice and preceptorship.

**Is clinical supervision new to nursing in Victoria?**

No, clinical supervision is not a recent trend. In social work it has been around for over 100 years. Clinical supervision has been undertaken by mental health nurses in Victoria since the mid to late 1990s.

Nurses working in mental health setting have clinical supervision written into their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) and must undertake at least 5 sessions per calendar year. *Clinical supervision Requirements and Guidelines ACMHN Standards of Practice for Australian Mental Health Nurses: 2010*, governs clinical supervision arrangements.

**What is the process of commencement of Clinical Supervision?**

Before entering into a clinical supervision agreement both the clinical supervisor and clinical supervisee discuss clinical supervision arrangements with their respective line managers. Clinical supervisor should not occupy operational or line management responsibility for the clinical supervisee. The clinical supervisor is obliged to be undertaking their own clinical supervision.

The locations for clinical supervision will be, using all possible processes, free from disruptions and beneficial to the meeting being effective.

A supervisor should not be supervising more than 2 individual nurses or 2 nursing groups at any one time.

A supervisee may have more than one supervisor at any given time to make the most of other specific expertise and /or competencies.

**How is clinical supervision delivered?**

Clinical supervision may occur in face to face, individual, group, telephone or videoconferencing formats. Clinical supervision is contextualised by a variety of theoretical perspectives.

**How frequent are clinical supervision sessions?**

Ideally the sessions should occur at least monthly, for not less than one hour. Supervision sessions usually run for between 6 and 12 months.
Is clinical supervision confidential?

Confidentiality within clinical supervision is not unconditional. Exemptions include unsafe practice, duty of care, mandatory reporting requirements, pursuant to a subpoena, a search warrant, in disclosure requirements of a criminal case, Freedom of Information or under the Coroner's Act.

Clinical supervision documentation will include a formal clinical supervision agreement, details about clinical supervision model, format (individual/group, peer), frequency and venue for sessions, attendance schedule and details of conflict resolution process.

Both supervisor and supervisee keep copies of the formal clinical supervision agreement. Supervisor and supervisee will decide what particulars of the session are to be recorded. The purpose of documenting the clinical supervision sessions enables the supervisor and supervisee to monitor progress and assists with review and evaluation processes.

The gathering and storing of clinical supervision documentation will be negotiated between the supervisor and the supervisee. However, the supervisor has a duty to ensure that clinical supervision documentation is stored in a safe space.

What happens if a conflict occurs between the supervisor and the supervisee?

The process of conflict resolution must be followed by both parties.

From the first meeting the supervisor must discuss what happens in the event of, conflict between supervisor and supervisee may occur.

Early identification and resolution of conflict in clinical supervision will make the supervisory relationship stronger.

If the clinical supervisee feels wronged in some way, the issue can initially be taken up with the clinical supervisor.

If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved in this way either party may refer the matter to the immediate supervisors.

Is clinical supervision evaluated?

The Clinical Supervision agreement and progress of supervision is reviewed and evaluated by supervisor and supervisee after the first 3 months, subsequently every 6 months.

When does clinical supervision end?

Usually a shared decision can be made between the supervisee and the supervisor to end the supervision relationship. This should be agreed between both parties in relation to when this will happen. Any documentation related to the supervision sessions shall be kept / destroyed by the supervisee as they see fit.

The decision to end the supervision sessions must be communicated to relevant lines managers usually within 5-7 working days.
How does a nurse become a clinical supervisor?

The potential clinical supervisor (registered nurse) undertakes the clinical supervisor’s course at the Centre for Psychiatric Nursing (CPN). This is a three day course, two days of which are introductory to the models and practice of receiving clinical supervision and the third and final day is devoted to embedding the training and the role of the supervisor. A Certificate of Completion is provided to the participant at the end of training. On completion of clinical supervision training the clinical supervisor will inform their line manager of their new role as a clinical supervisor and they should be able to commence supervision of a minimum of 1 nurse.

If I don’t want to become a supervisor can I still get clinical supervision?

You can receive clinical supervision provided you have completed the two day training in clinical supervision at the CPN. At the end of the two day training you will receive a Certificate of Completion. Your line manager should be able to provide you with the names and contact details of a clinical supervisor so you can begin to contact a supervisor and make arrangements to commence clinical supervision.

References


Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN). (2010). Standards of Practice for Australian Mental Health Nurses. ACMHN Inc.: Canberra.

Australian College of Mental Health Nurses Inc. (2012). Documenting clinical supervision. ACMHN, Canberra.

