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*A Position Statement does not carry the force and effect of law and rules but is adopted by the Board as a means of providing direction to licensees who seek to engage in safe nursing practice. Board Position Statements address issues of concern to the Board relevant to protection of the public and are reviewed regularly for relevance and accuracy to current practice, the Nursing Practice Act, and Board Administrative Code Rules.*

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**Issue:**

Psychotherapy is:

1. Treatment of mental or emotional disorders and behavioral and adjustment problems through a contractual and therapeutic relationship employing therapeutic communication approaches along with evaluation and management services, when indicated.
2. The goals of psychotherapy are to relieve distress, promote behavioral and lifestyle changes, guide personal awareness, improve social functioning and facilitate overall personal growth. There are many recognized types of therapeutic approaches including, but not limited to, psychodynamic, behavioral, and psychoeducational. Clients can be individual adults, youth or children, couples, families and groups.

**RN Role:**

1. Psychotherapy is within the scope of practice of a Registered Nurse (RN) who has completed an education program which prepares the nurse to perform this advanced practice nursing activity.
2. This level of education occurs in an advanced academic degree-granting program which prepares the RN for advanced practice either as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing or as a Psychiatric and Mental Health Nurse Practitioner.
3. These advanced practice nurses are educationally prepared for advanced assessment and diagnosis of mental illness, planning therapeutic interventions, and providing psychotherapy.

**Note:**

1. The RN without advanced practice education cannot diagnose mental illness nor independently plan for or implement psychotherapy.
2. Nothing in this statement should be construed to prevent the qualified RN from providing counseling to clients for the purpose of assisting the client to reach an optimum level of functioning.

**References:**

[G.S. 90-171.42 \(b\) Nursing Practice Act: Continuing Education Programs](#)  
[G.S. 90-18 \(c\)\(5\) Practicing without license; penalties](#)  
[21NCAC 36.0228 - Clinical Nurse Specialist Practice](#)

[21 NCAC 36.0801 \(4\) - Approval and Practice Parameters for Nurse Practitioners \(Definitions\)](#)

[21 NCAC 36.0223 \(a\)\(1\)\(C\) – Continuing Education Program](#)

[21 NCAC 36.0224 Components of Nursing Practice for the Registered Nurse](#)

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) -

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies/index.shtml>

Origin: 1/1992

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