

## Fitness to Practice: A Concept Analysis

**Suleman Jacob<sup>1</sup>, Shazia Rasool<sup>1</sup>, Sarba Ali khan<sup>1</sup>, Shireen Arif<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Ziauddin University, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Corresponding Author: Shazia Rasool, MSN Scholar** Faculty of Nursing & Midwifery  
Ziauddin University, [lt.25804@zu.edu.pk](mailto:lt.25804@zu.edu.pk)

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### **Abstract:**

**Background:** Fitness to practice (FTP) is a concept fundamental to nursing, such that practitioners are held to professional, ethical, and clinical standards for delivering safe patient care. Fitness to practice has no clear operational definition among the regulatory agencies, curriculum in academe, and health care settings.

**Objective:** This research is proposed to examine and define the concept of fitness to practice in the practice of nursing through Walker and Avant's concept analysis framework.

**Methods:** This paper uses Walker and Avant's eight-step approach to analyze the uses, defining characteristics, antecedents, consequences, and empirical referents of the FTP concept. Literature was obtained from CINAHL, PubMed, and Scopus databases (2010–2025) with emphasis on regulation, clinical competence, impairment, and ethics.

**Results:** The most important characteristics of fitness to practice are clinical competence, psychological and physical health, ethical conduct, and compliance with professional standards. Antecedents are educational preparation, licensure, and regulatory mechanisms. Consequences of compromised FTP are patient injury, professional misconduct, and licensure revocation. A model case is illustrated with borderline and contrary cases to illustrate concept clarity.

**Conclusion:** Clearing fitness to practice improves regulatory uniformity and guides policy, education, and intervention activities related to the delivery of safe, competent nursing practice.

**Keywords:** Fitness to practice, competence, credibility

### **Introduction:**

The principle of Fitness to Practice (FTP) is central to the provision of safe, competent, ethical, and person-centered care within nursing. FTP is the continuous capacity of nurses to perform their responsibilities as per professional, legal, and ethical requirements of their regulatory authorities. The evaluation of FTP goes beyond the initial licensure and also involves continued competence, behavior, decision-making, emotional stability, and health status throughout a nurse's career. FTP is necessary not just for public safety but also for upholding the image and responsibility of the nursing profession.

Yet, the construct is still vague and differently defined across education, policy, and regulation settings. It is utilized in situations of disciplinary proceeding, mental health evaluations, clinical incompetence, or professional misconduct—without a single operational definition that captures all these aspects. Conceptualizing FTP can orient education, practice, and regulation by making clear what FTP is, how it is defined, and what its outcomes mean for nurses and patients.

Fitness for practice refers to professionals' overall competence to carry out their individual role, their professional and personal behavior, and how any health problem will affect their ability to deliver safe care.

Every quality and capability of an individual pertaining to his/her ability to practice as an RN, including but not restricted to freedom from any intellectual, physical, mental or emotional status, and independence from reliance upon alcohol, drugs or other medications that limit his/her capacity.

### **Determine the Defining Attributes**

1. Clinical Competence
2. Ethical and Professional Behavior
3. Physical and Mental Health
4. Compliance with Law and Regulatory Requirements
5. Effective Communication and Emotional Awareness

A nurse with current clinical abilities, effective communication, emotional robustness, observance of codes of practice, and compliance with regulatory scrutiny is an ideal of fitness to practice.

### **Applications of the Concept**

Regulatory use: Utilized by councils and boards to ascertain licensure status.

Context educational: Institutions of learning apply FTP to define advancement in nursing studies.

Clinical environment: Employers apply FTP to competency assurance and risk management.

### **Antecedents:**

1. Graduation from accredited nursing education
2. Licensure and professional registration
3. Familiarity with legal/ethical requirements
4. Availability of continuous professional development
5. Organizational and regulatory frameworks (e.g., NMC, disciplinary boards)

### **Consequences:**

1. Safe, high-quality patient care
2. Maintenance of public trust in healthcare professionals
3. Professional recognition and promotion
4. Harm to patients or colleagues through unsuitable practice
5. Loss of licensure or legal/disciplinary sanction

### **Model Case:**

Say hello to Emily, a registered nurse with three years of experience in a high-traffic hospital environment. Emily has always practiced a strong patient-centered approach and good communication.

### **Borderline Case:**

Zara is a nurse with very good clinical competencies but lacks prompt documentation and tends to respond emotionally in stressful situations. Although patient safety is ensured, professionalism and communication are lost at times.

### **Contrary Case:**

Jacob is a nurse whose skills are not current, is rude to patients and lacks compassion. He often disregards protocols and refuses to pursue continuing education. His practice is harmful to patients and violates nursing codes.

## Theoretical Integration

- 1- Patricia Benner's 'Novice to Expert' Model highlights experiential learning as the basis of clinical competence. This evolution reaffirms that FTP is dynamic and context-specific.
- 2- Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring links emotional and ethical aspects of care with the welfare of nurses. It affirms that emotional intelligence, ethical integrity, and self-awareness are integral parts of FTP.

## Conclusion

This analysis illustrates how fitness to practice is a dynamic and complex concept. It incorporates the interconnectivity of competence, behavior, health, ethics, and legal accountability, and needs to be constantly assessed over the course of a nurse's career. Incorporating regulatory, individual, and institutional viewpoints, FTP is a complicated but vital protection for patient safety and professional integrity. Regulatory approaches currently tend to respond to FTP after the event. But proactive thinking of FTP as professional development and ethical thought could encourage a culture of responsibility and assistance. Benner and Watson's theoretical approaches are grounded in the dynamic, people-focused character of FTP. They draw attention to reflective practice, emotional strength, and moral growth—all essential to long-term fitness in situations of complexity.

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