



UKONS recommendations for staff who administer SACT in the UK

The UKONS Board have been asked by its members for guidance about NMC registered nursing associates who are employed as band 4 staff giving SACT drugs. We have consulted with members of the UKONS SACT MIG Committee, the UKONS Lead Cancer Nurse forum and external organisations to draft this Position Statement.

Standardised SACT competence frameworks in the UK

The [UKONS SACT Competence Learning Outcomes Framework](#) and [UKONS SACT Competence Passport](#) was adopted by the NHS ESR Group in February 2019 as the national standard for SACT competence assessment in the UK. UKONS strongly recommend that all SACT practitioners in the UK are assessed using this standardised assessment documentation. The requisite for completing the UKONS SACT Competence Passport is that clinicians are registered nurses, pharmacists or therapy radiographers.

Level of qualification required to administer SACT

The UKONS Board recommend that staff who administer SACT complete a university-accredited SACT course accredited at HEI level 6 (BSc Hons) or level 7 (MSc) alongside the UKONS SACT Competency Passport. This level of study reflects the complexity of the role in identifying toxicities; identifying evidence that supports symptom and side effect assessment, prevention and management; rationalising how SACT is delivered; managing treatment-related emergencies; providing patient-centred, individually-tailored patient information and support; and demonstrating advanced communication skills to discuss SACT treatment in relation to cancer diagnosis with patients and their families. The level of study also accounts for the need for SACT clinicians to be able to effectively and critically utilise best evidence to reflect on their practice, in order to be safe and competent practitioners.

For most universities in the UK the pre-requisite level of academic study required to apply for a SACT course is HEI level 6. The required level of qualification for nursing associates is a foundation degree (accredited at HEI level 4 and level 5), so for nursing associates to undertake a post-registration SACT course they would first need to gain a post-registration award at HEI-level 6. There are several online SACT courses accredited at level 6 and level 7 that are available (advertised in UKONS Breaking News) to support this service need.

Job evaluation for a junior SACT nurse

Using the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook ([The NHS Staff Council Working in Partnership 7th ed., 2018](#)), we performed a job evaluation for a junior SACT nurse who administers drugs to adults with cancer. The score was 393. Note that the score for a band 5 is 326 – 395, so at the upper end of a band 5. In consideration of staff who might not administer all SACT drugs by all routes of administration, e.g. not administer intramuscular or intravenous SACT drugs, the job evaluation was reviewed and scoring deducted for the knowledge, physical skills, financial and physical resources (use of expensive equipment), physical effort

and mental effort required for parenteral drug administration. For staff who would be required to administer SACT restricted to oral drugs, the score was 360, which also scores as a band 5 role.

Another consideration in reference to the level of academic qualification to administer SACT, is that investment needs to be made in educating, training and assessing SACT nurses, who will themselves be assessors in the future when they hold roles that are band 6 and above. Thus, there needs to be opportunity for SACT-qualified nurses to progress through the career and NHS banding structure.

To ensure equity of roles and responsibilities within pay bands, UKONS does not, therefore, support the practice of band 4 nursing staff administering SACT to adults with cancer.

Administration of parenteral medicines by NMC registered nursing associates

The NMC (2018) Standards of Proficiency for Nursing Associates Part 2.10 Procedural competencies required for administering medicines safely, states that the scope of medicines management for registered nursing associates is: 10.4 administer medication via oral, topical and inhalation routes; 10.5 administer injections using subcutaneous and intramuscular routes and manage injection equipment; 10.6 administer and monitor medications using enteral equipment; and 10.7 administer enemas and suppositories.

There are exemptions for the administration of parenteral medicines, which is limited to Schedule 19 medicines for purpose of saving a life in an emergency ([NHS HEE Advisory Guidance Administration of Medicines by Nursing Associates, 2017](#)). Thus, organisations need to ensure that additional post-registration education, training and assessment has been completed and achieved by NMC registered nursing associates prior to administering parenteral medicines. For nursing associates who work in chemotherapy services that have completed additional post-registration education, training and assessment for intravenous drug administration, a Standard Operating Protocol may be developed for these staff to administer intravenous non-SACT drugs.

The possibility of splicing the role of SACT clinicians

The UKONS Board also considered the possibility of having SACT-qualified staff who are only able to undertake a restricted range of SACT-related activities, since many of the roles required to be a SACT nurse are not within the remit of NMC registered nursing associates. For example, having staff at different pay bands providing care and being responsible for pre-treatment assessment, providing information about symptom and side effect management, planning and evaluating care, administering of specific types of SACT within a treatment cycle, such as vesicants, and so on. This approach to SACT practice is contrary to the model of patient-centred, holistic SACT care that is strongly advocated by UKONS and which the standardised UKONS SACT Competence Learning Outcomes Framework and Passport are based upon. UKONS does not, therefore, recommend this model of practice. Furthermore, if a task-orientated approach to practice is to be used, a full risk-assessment is needed to ensure safe care can be maintained, as the risk of incidents might increase if different personnel are responsible for administering different elements of SACT treatment and care.

UKONS recommendation for nurses who administer SACT

Having considered the points above, the UKONS Board recommend that staff who administer SACT hold a HEI level 6 or level 7 qualification and are employed in a role that is band 5 or above.

We are aware that the drive for band 4 staff to administer SACT is primarily in response to demands on capacity and pressurised SACT services, but we strongly urge organisations that have SACT services to support the development of their registered band 5 and above health professional workforce to become SACT clinicians to sustain their SACT services.