



## You've asked a practice advisor: Can I use abbreviations when documenting care?

By Virgil Guitard, RN

**T**he reason for establishing and maintaining client records, including nurses' notes, lies in the general commitment of high quality client care. The chart is part of the client's support system while under the care of health professionals, and it is directed primarily toward serving the interests and care of the client.

All health care providers must document the care they provide. Registered nurses, as regulated health care professionals, have a professional

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responsibility to record the care provided to a client. Nursing care is not considered to be complete unless it is documented.

The primary purpose of documentation is to communicate information to other members of the health care team enabling them to make prudent professional judgments, and to ensure continuity of care. Abbreviations can be an effective and efficient form of documentation if their meaning is well understood by the health care providers and others who may read the health record. If abbreviations are used, they should be standardized throughout an agency and formally noted in the agency's policy/procedure manual.

Abbreviations must be consistent so that they mean the same thing to everyone who reads the record. This means consistent interpretation and continuity of care. The use of unauthorized abbreviations can compromise patient safety leading to error or, at the least, waste time for the person trying to find out what was meant. Nurses must use only the abbreviations approved for use in their agency.

In New Brunswick, the *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses(2005)* requires all nurses to ensure that their practice and conduct meet legislative requirements and respect policies and standards relevant to the profession and their practice setting. Nurses have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with and follow agency policies

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and procedures including those on documentation. The importance of employers' policies in the area of documentation, including the use of abbreviations, cannot be overstated.

If you have any questions regarding nursing practice standards as they relate to your practice, you can call NANB's Practice Department at 1.800.442-4417/506.458-8731 or by email at [nanb@nanb.nb.ca](mailto:nanb@nanb.nb.ca). □

### NANB Consultation Services

Did you know that NANB offers individual, one-on-one, consultation services?

This confidential service is offered to support New Brunswick nurses and to encourage safe, ethical, and competent practice.

Consultation is offered on a wide variety of issues such as the interpretation of Association documents and government legislation, scope of practice issues, ethical behaviours and standards, issues of safety and appropriate action, conflict resolution, and the management of procedural and practice issues.

If you would like to access NANB Consultation Services, please contact Virgil Guitard, Nursing Practice Advisor, tel.: (506) 783-8745, toll free 1 800 442-4417 or email: [vguitard@nanb.nb.ca](mailto:vguitard@nanb.nb.ca).