

By VIRGIL GUITARD

YOU'VE ASKED

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“I am a nurse practitioner hired to work in the emergency department. I am occasionally asked to replace a registered nurse for a shift on a medical nursing unit. Can I do this?”

You can work as an RN on any nursing unit because even though you are registered as a NP, you are an RN. Nurse practitioners in NB are also Registered Nurses and must meet the standards of practice for both NPs and RNs. Working part-time as a nurse practitioner and part-time as a registered nurse is what is called ‘sequential practice’. Practicing sequentially requires a clear understanding of the respective roles and a clear separation of work schedules.

Before accepting to take on the role of an RN you must determine whether or not you have the knowledge and competence to work with this specific client population. Once this determination is made and you accept the work assignment, it has to be clear to the employer, the healthcare team and clients that you are practicing as an RN and not as a NP. When being asked to work with admitted patients, you have to practice as an RN as NPs in NB do not have the authority to practice on inpatient units. This means you are not authorized to diagnose, order tests and prescribe medication and furthermore, these functions are outside the scope of practice of an RN. Also, you must utilize the designation RN when identifying yourself or when providing your signature. However, because you are also a NP, you will be expected to apply your knowledge in advanced health assessment which means that you may assess and identify client issues that an RN might not. If so, you would be expected to report your assessment findings to another provider (for example, a physician) for follow up.

What if, as a NP employed in the emergency department, I am asked to replace an RN colleague in the emergency department?

This is also considered ‘sequential practice’ however, in this particular scenario there is a higher risk of role confusion for clients and colleagues alike. It may be tempting to respond to clients’ need as a NP since this is what would normally be expected of you when working as a NP in the ER, but since you are working as an RN, your role has to stay within the limits of the RN’s scope of practice. The employer, healthcare team and patients must clearly understand that you are not authorized to provide services such as diagnosing and prescribing when working as a RN even if it’s within the same work setting as where you normally practice as a NP.

NANB does not support concurrent or simultaneous practice within the same position, shift, or clinical situation, an individual practices both as a NP and as an RN. This would contribute

to role confusion and blurring of accountability.

Do the hours worked as an RN count for my NP registration?

When working as an RN, those hours cannot be reported as NP hours for registration purposes. To maintain and renew registration, a NP must have worked 600 hours as a NP in primary healthcare during the previous two calendar years.

For more information on this practice question or other nursing practice issues, please contact the NANB’s Practice Advisor at 1 800 442-4417 or by email at nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

REFERENCES

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College of Nurses of Ontario (2010). *Questions and Answers for Nurse Practitioners*. Toronto: Author. » www.cno.org/for/rnec/np_qas.html#Top5

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2010). *Position Statement: Midwifery*. Fredericton: Author.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2010). *Standards of Practice for Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioners*. Fredericton: Author. » www.nanb.nb.ca/PDF/NP_Standards-FINAL-E.pdf

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.