

By VIRGIL GUITARD

YOU'VE ASKED

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What are my responsibilities as a staff registered nurse when student nurses are assigned to "my" client(s)?

IN ANY PRACTICE SETTING, the primary responsibility of a registered nurse (RN) is to clients. You are responsible for assessing your clients, for establishing and executing the plan of care and for evaluating the outcomes of the care provided, in accordance with the Nursing Standards, *Code of Ethics* for Registered Nurses and employer policies. You are also responsible for coordinating the care delivered by other health care providers, including nursing students. Nursing students learn from formal education, structured clinical practicum and the unstructured, spontaneous sharing of knowledge, skills and advice from RN colleagues at the bedside. As an RN, you have a professional (standards) and ethical (code of ethics) obligation to support student nurses in clinical settings and to facilitate the development and refinement of competencies expected of future beginning nurses.

RNs are responsible for the overall care of the clients, however, when working with nursing students, some components of client care will be shared. In clinical settings, nursing students are usually supervised by a clinical instructor who is responsible for assigning nursing tasks and for providing support and supervision to the nursing student but the RN must make herself available for student and clinical instructor alike, for assistance or consultation with assigned activities. In order to provide a meaningful and positive learning experience, communication between the RN, the clinical instructor and the nursing student is key and should happen in an open, respectful and professional manner. Expected responsibilities regarding

client care need to be clearly communicated and agreed upon by the RN, the clinical instructor and the student.

While the clinical instructor is responsible for the overall learning plan of nursing students, RNs involved in supporting nursing students should understand the level of competence of the nursing student (i.e., 1st year student vs 3rd year student) and the objectives of the clinical experience and assignments. The nursing students and clinical instructor should have the opportunity to discuss with the RN the learning plan which will help the RN understand and clarify the responsibilities that the nursing students will take and what responsibilities the staff RN will continue to carry. The clinical instructor cannot be expected to be with all students at all times, therefore staff RNs may heighten the learning experience for nursing students by including them in care experiences, teaching and demonstrating nursing as appropriate.

In any learning experience, there is the possibility or risk of errors or omissions. In order to minimize those risks, it is important that the RN, the clinical instructor and the nursing students establish an open line of communication that will enable the RN to stay updated with the client's status and to provide the required nursing care as needed. If the RN has fulfilled her responsibilities (e.g., care plan, appropriate supervision) and had no way of knowing that the error was going to occur, an RN sharing the care of clients with a nursing students is **not** accountable for the nursing student's error—nursing students are responsible for their own actions.

RNs are expected to share their

nursing knowledge and expertise with their colleagues, including learners. Effective communication between those involved ensures a successful educational experience for the learner and for participating RNs, and ensures that the client receives safe, competent and ethical care.

To speak with a Practice Advisor/Consultant about supporting nursing students, contact the Nurses Association of New Brunswick's Practice department at 1-800-442-4417 / 506-458-8731 or by email at www.nanb.nb.ca.

More information on supporting student nurses can also be found in the following two documents:

- Managing Legal Risks in Preceptorships, Canadian Nurses Protective Society. www.cnps.ca/index.php?page=92
- Practice Guideline: Supporting learners, Nurses Association of New Brunswick. [www.nanb.nb.ca/downloads/Practice GuidelineSupporting Learners in the Workplace-E.pdf](http://www.nanb.nb.ca/downloads/Practice%20GuidelineSupporting%20Learners%20in%20the%20Workplace-E.pdf) ■

REFERENCE

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College of Nurses of Ontario (2009). *Practice Guideline: Supporting Learners*. Toronto: Author.

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