

YOU'VE ASKED

What is meant by patient abandonment?

The practice of registered nurses (RNs), is guided by standards which outline the expected conduct of members of the profession. The *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses* in New Brunswick state that an RN “is responsible for practising safely, competently and ethically and is accountable to the client, employer, profession and the public”. This is demonstrated when they act in accordance with relevant legislation, NANB standards, and the Code of Ethics.

The concept of abandonment is directly related to the therapeutic nurse-client relationship, which is formed for the purpose of meeting the client’s health care needs. The relationship is planned, time-limited and goal directed and RNs enter into the relationship with a commitment to provide quality service. Once care of a patient has been undertaken, an RN has

the ethical and legal responsibility to provide care for the assigned period of time. Abandonment occurs when an RN has engaged with a client or has accepted an assignment and then discontinues care without:

- negotiating a mutually acceptable withdrawal of service with the client; or
- arranging for suitable, or replacement services; or
- allowing the employer a reasonable opportunity for alternative or replacement services to be provided.

An RN, who discontinues care without meeting the above conditions, could face disciplinary action from their employer as per policy and/or contractual stipulations, and this could also

include a complaint being lodged with NANB for professional misconduct.

RNs are accountable for their actions, decisions and professional conduct and are responsible for appropriately establishing, maintaining and terminating the therapeutic nurse-client relationship. In most circumstances, this relationship ends when the episode of care ends. However, there may be circumstances (e.g. serious threat of harm to the RN, a conflict of interest that compromises the RN’s duty) that require an RN to terminate the relationship before the episode of care has ended. When handled appropriately this is not considered abandonment, however, this should not be undertaken lightly and should only occur when all other avenues have been considered. Further guidance can be found in the *Standards for the Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship*.

Situations Which Could Be Considered Abandonment

leaving in the middle of a scheduled shift without notifying your supervisor and without transferring care to another appropriate care provider

being unavailable to provide care due to other activities (e.g. phone, gaming, sleeping)

refusing to care for a client after accepting responsibility without transferring care to another nurse or allowing your manager to find a replacement

Situations That Would Not Be Considered Abandonment

refusing to work extra hours or shifts beyond the posted work schedule when you’ve given proper notice

withdrawing from care due to fitness to practice concerns (personal health issues, including fatigue) with appropriate notice