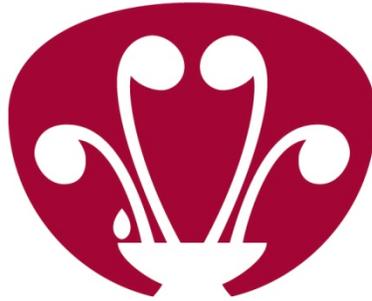




Nurses Association
OF NEW BRUNSWICK

PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Supporting Learners in the Workplace



Mission

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick is a professional regulatory organization that exists to protect the public and to support nurses by promoting and maintaining standards for nursing education and practice, and by promoting healthy public policy.

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ISBN 1 895613-60-4

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Acknowledgements

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick gratefully acknowledges permission granted by the College of Nurses of Ontario to quote and adapt, in whole, or in part, from the publications cited.

Introduction

Registered nurses¹ (RNs) in all roles share the responsibility for creating a culture of learning in which learners² are supported in developing and refining the competencies needed for providing safe, competent and ethical care. RNs are often confronted with competing work priorities within the practice environment that leave little time for learners who depend on mentorship and collaboration to meet their learning needs. Therefore, there is a need for RNs to work with others to create a moral community³ in which learners feel safe to ask questions and are valued for their contributions to the health-care team.

In any practice setting, the primary responsibility of an RN is to the client.⁴ All RNs involved in supporting learners will place the safety and well-being of the client above all other objectives, including fulfilling educational obligations. Throughout the learning experience, the safety and well-being of clients will be promoted.

This Guideline clarifies the responsibilities of RNs in formal educator and preceptor roles, or informal collegial relationships in supporting learners. It also outlines the responsibility of learners to work with experienced RNs and ensure client safety. RNs and learners require a setting that is supportive of learning experiences and needs, therefore this document provides strategies for creating practice settings that are supportive of learners.

The NANB *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses (2005)*, stipulates that all RNs are expected to promote a learning environment that supports on-going professional development for competent nursing practice and to share knowledge and expertise with learners. RNs have a duty to uphold the standards of the profession and to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects well on the profession. RNs treat colleagues, including students, in a respectful manner while recognizing the power differentials among those in formal leadership positions, staff and students. RNs are expected to share their knowledge and provide guidance “for the professional development of nursing students, novice nurses and other health-care team members” (*Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses, 2008, p. 19*).

¹ In this document, RN refers to a Registered Nurse (RN) and Nurse Practitioner (NP).

² A learner is defined as a person studying nursing at the baccalaureate, graduate or doctorate level; an RN new to the profession; an experienced RN entering a new practice setting; an RN new to practice in New Brunswick; and students of other health-care professions.

³ Moral Community refers to a workplace where values are made clear and are shared; where these values direct ethical action and where individuals feel safe to be heard (*CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses (2008)*).

⁴ The term client may be an individual, a family, a group or a community.

Responsibilities of Registered Nurses Supporting Learners

All RNs involved in supporting learners will:

- understand the learner's level of preparation (knowledge and skills) and the learner's practice limitations;
- understand the objectives of the experience and the supervision requirements;
- be available to discuss the learning plan with the learner;
- understand and clarify the responsibilities of self and of the learner;
- be available to the learner for assistance or consultation;
- communicate with the learner in an open, respectful and professional manner;
- advocate for an appropriate learning environment;
- advocate for systems and resources that support RN learners in new environments;
- act as a role model for professional nursing practice; and
- demonstrate cultural sensitivity, in relation to the diversity of learners.

Accountabilities of Registered Nurses Supporting Learners

In supporting learners, an RN is accountable both for sharing appropriate nursing knowledge and for maintaining safe, competent and ethical client care in accordance with nursing standards. The RN working with the learner is *not* accountable for the learner's actions if the RN has fulfilled her/ his responsibilities as outlined by the employer and in the learning agreement, if applicable (e.g. learning plan, appropriate supervision). However, in accordance with the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2008), the primary responsibility for the nursing care received by the client remains that of the primary nurse to whom the client has been assigned, (e.g. The RN should ensure that the learner is reporting to her on patient status throughout the shift).

Guidelines for Registered Nurses in the Educator Role

The RN in an educator⁵ role will:

- utilize the best available knowledge and resources , ensuring the curriculum is current best practice (i.e. evidence based) and relevant;
- be aware of the learner's capabilities;
- ensure the learner's assignment is appropriate for the goals and objectives of the educational experience;
- maintain or facilitate access to the knowledge, judgement and skills relevant to the learner's practice experience; and
- be directly involved in the learning process through consultation with the learner, preceptor and other staff in the clinical setting, including the administrator, as required.

⁵ The term *educator* refers to a clinical or staff educator whose role is teaching to clients and other health care professionals; or a nurse who is an educator/faculty member in an educational setting whose role is teaching nursing and nursing-related topics to learners of health care disciplines.

Guidelines for Registered Nurses in the Administrator Role

The RN in an administrator role will:

- identify RNs who are expert or proficient practitioners (Benner, 2001) to act in the preceptor role;
- facilitate communication so the educator, preceptor and learner are aware of the learner's knowledge, skill and judgement and the objectives of the experience;
- assess the workload of all RNs whose clients are cared for by learners and make ongoing workload adjustments so that RNs are available to support and communicate with learners; and
- provide resources that support a learning environment.

Guidelines for Registered Nurses in the Preceptor Role

In practice settings, RNs act in formal support roles, such as preceptors⁶, to ensure client safety and facilitate a learning environment that encourages professional growth, career development and safe, competent and ethical care. The RN in a preceptor role will:

- determine from the learner the limitations of that learner's knowledge and skills;
- recommend and facilitate learning experiences that address the learner's goals;
- clarify the responsibilities the learner will assume and what responsibilities the RN will continue to carry;
- guide the learner to effectively access resources and work within the setting;
- provide necessary supervision as stated in the preceptor agreement, if applicable;
- provide coaching and role modeling of standards of nursing practice and employer policies;
- evaluate and provide accurate and timely written and verbal feedback to the learner and the educator/administrator, as appropriate;
- deal with situations involving an unsafe learner by increasing direct supervision and notifying the educator;
- negotiate for the implementation of support systems such as open feedback and routine communication with educators; and
- advocate for support in the development of educational skills for preceptors that include the knowledge to challenge the proficient learner and the ability to address the unsafe learner.

⁶ The term *preceptor* is defined as a proficient or expert practitioner who enters into a one-to-one relationship with a learner for a set period of time to provide on-site supervision along with clinical teaching.

Guidelines for the Learner

The learner will:

- ensure the safety and well-being of the clients in the learning experience;
- recognize her/his knowledge, skills and judgement, limits of responsibilities, and supervision requirements;
- contribute to the development of learning objectives for the learning experience;
- understand and clarify her/his role in the provision of care with the educator/preceptor;
- use clear, accurate and effective communication skills in professional interactions;
- identify the need for, and act to obtain supervision;
- be aware of her/his responsibility to notify the educator if she or he is not achieving learning objectives due to the setting and/or preceptor relationship;
- be accountable for the quality of care she/he provides within the established learning objectives; and
- become familiar with and follow the agency's policies and procedures.

Strategies for Supporting a Culture for Learning

RNs and learners are best able to provide safe, competent and ethical care when they are in an environment that supports quality nursing practice. Quality practice settings support and facilitate learning opportunities by:

- fostering positive clinical placement relationships with educational facilities;
- ensuring that clinical placement agreements articulate current, applicable responsibilities;
- considering workload and staff scheduling that addresses the transitional needs of RN learners (e.g., they need sufficient time to discuss and plan care with colleagues and those clients receiving care; they benefit from matching new RNs with experienced ones);
- promoting an environment that encourages learners to pose questions, engage in reflective practice and ask for assistance without being criticized;
- engaging educational institutions to foster teaching-learning relationships;
- providing professional development opportunities for preceptors;
- providing access to resources;
- formally recognizing preceptors for their contribution to learners, (i.e. thank-you card, recognition in the staff newsletter, or a formal letter for the preceptor's personnel file); and
- working with the educational faculty to ensure appropriate placements, including the evaluation of placements.

Entry-level Registered Nurse Practice

While a supportive practice environment is an essential component to the practice of all RNs, it is a critical component that encourages entry-level RNs to feel welcome, safe, and valued. Professional development of competence to provide nursing care in situations of increased complexity is reached through experienced RNs sharing their knowledge, mentoring, guiding, and providing feedback to the entry-level RN.

The RN employer can help the entry-level RN adjust to work life as an employee, by ensuring an experienced RN is willing to act as a mentor (i.e. a designated RN who is willing to answer questions and provide guidance as requested throughout the shift). It is unrealistic to expect entry-level RNs to function at the level of practice of an experienced RN. However, with guidance the entry-level RN will consolidate her knowledge and experience to increase her nursing abilities to provide proficient and competent care, therefore, becoming an asset to the healthcare team.

Conclusion

Registered nurses are expected to share their nursing knowledge and expertise with their colleagues, including learners. This transfer of knowledge and support can be provided formally in a preceptor-learner relationship, or in an ongoing, informal process. Effective communication between those involved in the formal support system ensures a successful educational experience for the learner and for participating nurses, and ensures that the client receives safe, competent and ethical care.

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