

Fact Sheet: Abandonment

The practice of registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) is guided by the [Standards of Practice for RNs](#) which establishes their expected level of performance. NPs are also accountable to the [Standards of Practice for Nurse Practitioners](#). RNs and NPs are responsible for practising safely, competently, compassionately, and ethically and are accountable to the client, public, employer, and profession. This is demonstrated by practicing in accordance with relevant legislation, standards, Code of Ethics for RNs, regulatory requirements, and employer policies (Nurses Association of New Brunswick [NANB], 2019).

The concept of abandonment is directly related to the nurse-client relationship, which is formed for the purpose of meeting the client's health care needs. The nurse-client relationship is a purposeful, client-centered, and goal directed connection between a nurse and a client. Nurses are accountable for appropriately establishing, maintaining, and terminating the nurse-client relationship. Abandonment occurs when an RN or an NP 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 (NANB & NBNU, 2019).

Discontinuing care without meeting the above conditions could be considered abandonment. Abandonment can result in disciplinary action from the employer (as per policy and/or contractual stipulations) and/or a complaint being lodged with NANB for professional misconduct.

RNs and NPs are accountable for their actions, decisions, and professional conduct and are responsible for appropriately establishing, maintaining, and terminating the nurse-client relationship. There may be circumstances (e.g. serious threat of harm to the RN or NP, a conflict of interest) that require an RN or an NP to terminate the relationship. When handled appropriately this is not considered abandonment, however, this should only occur when all other possibilities have been considered (NANB, 2020). The Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) suggest that RNs and NPs seek legal advice before ending the nurse-client relationship in unwarranted circumstances (CNPS, 2017).

Situations that could be considered abandonment include but are not limited to:

- 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. engaged with social media, gaming, sleeping); or
- refusing to care for a client after accepting responsibility without transferring care to another RN or NP or allowing your manager to find a replacement.

Situations that would not be considered abandonment include but are not limited to:

- refusing to work extra hours or shifts beyond the posted work schedule when you've given proper notice; or
- withdrawing from care due to fitness to practice concerns (personal health issues, including fatigue) with appropriate notice.

Helpful Resources

[Practicing with Limited Resources: A Guide for RNs and NPs](#) (NANB & NBNU)

[Working with Limited Resources Toolkit](#) (NANB)

[Standards for the Nurse-Client Relationship](#) (NANB)

[Ask a lawyer: Ending the NP-Client Relationship](#) (CNPS)

[Professional Liability During the Shortage](#) (CNPS)

References

Canadian Nurses Protective Society. (2017). *Ask a Lawyer: Ending the NP-Client Relationship*.
<https://www.cnps.ca/index.php?page=494>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2019). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*.
<https://www.nanb.nb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NANB2019-RNPracticeStandards-E-web-1.pdf>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2020). *Standards for the Nurse-Client Relationship*. <https://www.nanb.nb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NANB-StandardsNurseClientRelation-Dec20-E.pdf>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick & New Brunswick Nurses Union. (2019). *Practicing with Limited Resources: A Guide for RNs and NPs*. <https://www.nanb.nb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NANB-NBNU-PractisingLimitedResources-Mar19-E-1.pdf>