



## Fact Sheet: Use of Professional Title

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) has received questions regarding the use of the title registered nurse (RN) and/or nurse practitioner (NP), in relation to selling products or health-related services. These nursing titles are protected in New Brunswick<sup>1</sup>, meaning that if a service provided by an RN or NP is not recognized by NANB as nursing practice<sup>2</sup>, the RN or NP cannot use their professional title. Additionally, an RN or NP cannot use their professional title to endorse a commercial product or service. Both these situations are considered misuse of title and a breach of the [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#) and the [Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#).

Endorsement occurs when an RN or NP uses their credentials to lend credibility to a commercial product, product line or a health service. For example, it is not acceptable to promote products in conjunction with your trusted authority as an RN or NP via social media, written communication, marketing materials or verbally<sup>3</sup>. If you are in a position of actual or perceived conflict of interest, for example, your role as an RN or NP is being discussed or considered in conjunction with the sale of a commercial product, you should declare this as a conflict. For more information on this see the [NANB Guidelines for Conflict of Interest](#). “Nurses are sensitive to the inherent power differentials between care providers and persons receiving care. They do not misuse that power to influence decision-making” (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2017, p. 11)<sup>4</sup>.

With regards to marketing/advertising a business, RNs and NPs must demonstrate professional and ethical decision-making. Responsible advertising is done in a manner that serves the interest of the public and pertains to activities within the RN or NP’s nursing practice. For more information on the importance of responsible advertising see the Competition Bureau of Canada<sup>5</sup>.

If a person uses the title RN or NP without being actively registered with NANB (for example being retired or on a leave with a non-practising registration), they are breaching the *Nurses Act*. Likewise, if a person is registered and they misuse their professional title to endorse a commercial product or service, they too are breaching the *Nurses Act*. Breaching the *Nurses Act* may result in an investigation by NANB and could result in a formal complaint. For additional information or questions related to use of professional title, please contact NANB at 1-800-442-4417 or e-mail [practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca](mailto:practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca).

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<sup>1</sup> See 12(1) of the [Nurses Act](#)

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the recognition of self-employed nursing practice, please refer to the [Guidelines for Self-Employed Practice](#)

<sup>3</sup> Nurses maintain appropriate professional boundaries and ensure their relationships are always for the benefit of the person. They recognize the potential vulnerability of persons receiving care and do not exploit their trust and dependency in a way that might compromise the therapeutic relationship. They do not abuse their relationship for personal or financial gain... (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2017, p.13).

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/04142.html>

## **Case Study: Can she use her RN title?**

Jill is registered nurse (RN) who works on an intensive care unit (ICU). She recently jumped at the opportunity to boost her income by working on the side with a new nutritional supplement company. The company employs RNs and other health professionals to promote and sell a new antioxidant that claims to have significant anti-aging properties.

During her orientation, the regional sales manager said that having an RN promote and sell the product gave it credibility and made it more appealing to consumers. He told Jill that she should be able to make good money in sales because consumers trust nurses and their health advice. Jill wasn't sure if the product worked but decided to give it a go anyway.

Jill began selling the antioxidant and found she enjoyed the work. She sold the supplement to health food stores, at trade shows and marketed the product on a company branded personal website. Working on commission, Jill felt she'd tapped into her entrepreneurial nature. The work flexibility also meshed well with her job in the ICU. On her personal website, in emails and on her business card Jill included her RN title after her name. This ensured that consumers knew she was an RN when they asked about, or purchased, the product.

### **Is Jill practising nursing?**

Jill needs to consider what enables her to use RN as a credential. The title RN relates to her licence to practise nursing and the nature of the work she does. When she uses the RN title, she is representing herself as a registered nurse.

### **Can Jill use her RN title?**

The regional sales manager encouraged Jill to use her title because it added credibility to the product and potentially increased sales. Unfortunately, just because Jill is registered doesn't mean she can use RN in any context. Jill needs to consider the context and purpose of including RN. It is not considered ethical to use the RN title if your job mainly involves marketing, endorsing or selling products or health-related services. Using RN on her website, business card and company emails is considered marketing. Other considerations include:

1. How might Jill's actions be perceived by a member of the public?
2. Might there be other unanticipated consequences to using her RN title in this way?
3. Could using her title this way affect public trust?



### **What should Jill do?**

1. Not use her professional title. Jill enjoys selling the product but has noticed people who are skeptical about the antioxidant often buy it once they find out she is a nurse. She mentions this to a colleague, who points her to the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) document *Use of Title*. Jill realizes that using RN in this context is not appropriate, as selling products is not the practice of nursing. She also knows that people trust nurses, and by telling people she is a nurse, she may influence their decision to buy. Jill decides she wants to keep selling the product but will no longer use her RN title or identify herself as a nurse in this role. She lets her manager know she won't be using the title RN anymore.
2. Talk with her sales manager. Jill needs clarification on what to do and calls the practice consultation service at NANB. She then approaches her regional sales manager with the information she learned. The manager says that having RN after her name is important in gaining the public trust and selling more product. He says that this was a key factor in their decision to hire her. Jill says that her sales and marketing work is not considered the practice of nursing. She explains that using RN in her title in this context is unethical. She decides that she can no longer work for the company.

*Thank you to the BC College of Nursing Professionals for permission to adapt their case study "Can She Use Her RN Title?"*