



Nurses Association
OF NEW BRUNSWICK



Association of New Brunswick
Licensed Practical Nurses

PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Caring for Clients Authorized to Use Medical Cannabis



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Introduction

The Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses (ANBLPN) and the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) are legislated to protect the public interest through the regulation of individual registered nurses (RN), nurse practitioners (NP) and licensed practical nurses (LPN). In this document, the term nursing professional will refer to all three classes.

The ANBLPN and NANB are mandated to ensure New Brunswick residents receive safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care. One way we meet this mandate is by developing resources about current or emerging nursing trends to assist nursing professionals in meeting their Standards of Practice. The use of medical cannabis is one such emerging trend.

This collaborative practice guideline was created to assist nursing professionals to understand their accountabilities and to provide practice guidance, so they may meet their Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics when caring for clients who use medical cannabis.

What is Medical Cannabis?

The term *medical cannabis* refers to the use of the whole unprocessed cannabis plant or its basic extracts to treat a disease or symptom (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015). Medical cannabis is generally used to alleviate symptoms of a disease or disorder; for example, it has been used to treat palliative care patients to relieve the symptoms of cancer pain, nausea, insomnia, and to improve appetite. Medical cannabis has also been used to treat symptoms associated with chronic conditions such as multiple sclerosis, epilepsy and spinal cord injuries as well as being used to treat chronic pain (Government of Canada, 2018).

According to the World Health Organization, cannabis use can have both short and long-term effects. In the short term, cannabis can impair cognitive and motor functioning and some first-time users may even experience anxiety and psychotic symptoms (Library of Parliament, 2017).

Other side effects of medical cannabis include drowsiness, euphoria or dysphoria, impaired motor coordination, impaired learning and memory, and an increased risk of psychosis (Government of Canada, 2018). Long-term use of cannabis may also result in cannabis abuse and dependency and those who start using cannabis during adolescence are at a greater risk for lasting impairments to memory, concentration and other cognitive functioning (Library of Parliament, 2017).

For more information on the use, dosing, adverse side effects and drug interactions associated with medical cannabis, view the Health Canada's [Information for Health Care Professionals](#)

How do clients obtain Medical Cannabis in New Brunswick?

As of October 17, 2018 the [Cannabis Act](#) and the [Cannabis Regulations](#) are the primary law governing both recreational and medical cannabis use in Canada. The *Cannabis Act* provides the statement of the law on cannabis, while the *Cannabis Regulations* provide the details on access to cannabis for medical purposes.

Clients must consult with an authorized healthcare practitioner to obtain a signed medical document in order to gain access to medical cannabis. If the client is in hospital¹ and cannabis is permitted by the hospital, a written order is required.

It is important to remember that each individual employer can make its own determination about access to medical cannabis. Administration and distribution can only be undertaken if the employer permits and with a medical document or written order (Canadian Nurses Protective Society [CNPS], 2018).

In New Brunswick, physicians and nurse practitioners are authorized to issue the medical document.

Once the medical document is obtained clients can access medical cannabis by:

- Purchasing directly from a federally licensed seller;
- Registering with Health Canada to produce a limited amount of cannabis for their own medical purposes; or
- Designating someone with approved authorization to produce it for them.

Standard of Practice and Code of Ethics

When providing care to clients who are using or are interested in using medical cannabis, nursing professionals are accountable to follow their Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, specifically relating to:

- Respecting client diversity;
- Respecting a client's right to informed consent;
- Optimizing the client's role in decision-making and the care process;
- Advocating for and following appropriate organizational policy.

The [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#), the [Canadian Nurses Association \(CNA\) Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#), the [Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada](#) and the [Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses](#) are core regulatory documents that guide nursing practice. These statements are the minimal expectation for any nursing professional in any setting or role. They serve as a guide to the professional knowledge, skill and judgement needed to practice nursing safely (CCPNR, 2013b; NANB, 2012).

¹The *Cannabis Regulations* defines a hospital as "a facility (a) that is licensed, approved or designated by a province under the laws of the province to provide care or treatment to individuals suffering from any form of disease or illness; or (b) that is owned or operated by the Government of Canada or the government of a province and that provides health services". As such under New Brunswick legislation, the definition of "hospital" may include facilities other than traditional hospitals from which health services are provided such as addition services, mental health services, public health services, extra-mural services and community health services (Regional Health Authorities Act, S.N.B. 2011, c. 217, s. 1).

Ethical Dilemmas

Nursing professionals caring for clients authorized to use medical cannabis may experience an ethical dilemma. Conflict can create an ethical dilemma for nursing professionals (ANBLPN, 2016). An ethical dilemma occurs when there are equally compelling reasons for different courses of action (Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2017a). With regards to medical cannabis, nursing professionals may see the negative side effects that could be harmful to clients, but also see the positive effects such as pain control and increased appetite. There may also be internal conflicts related to perceptions of the recreational use of cannabis or a lack of organizational policy or practice to guide decision-making.

Nursing professionals, as the largest group of healthcare providers, and often a client's first point of contact with the health care system, have the responsibility to assess, educate and support cannabis users (CNA, 2017b). Nursing professionals must also apply principles from their respective ethical codes. Both ethical codes have decision making models/frameworks which can assist you with addressing an ethical dilemma.

If the nursing professional is morally opposed to medical cannabis as a treatment, they may have difficulty in providing this treatment to clients. If they anticipate a personal conflict with a form of treatment, they must disclose this to their manager as soon as possible (CCPNR, 2013a; CNA, 2017). The nursing professional has the right to follow their conscience in these situations; however, if the treatment plan is in keeping with professional practice, the nursing professional must care for the client until an appropriate alternative arrangement can be made to meet the client's needs. Nursing professionals must legally adhere to their duty of care requirements which does not allow them to abandon patients, they must transfer care to another health care provider (CNPS, 2018).

Administration of Medical Cannabis

The *Cannabis Regulations* provides nursing professionals with the legal authority to possess and directly administer medical cannabis to clients with a medical authorization in a hospital setting, outside a hospital setting, or while providing care in home care.

There are important considerations prior to administration:

- There must be employer policy to support your practice (each employer can make their own determination about access to medical cannabis).
- The client must have an authorization (medical document or written order) for medical cannabis.
- You must have the knowledge, skill and individual competence to administer the cannabis safely, evaluate its effectiveness, and identify and manage adverse reactions.
- Ensure there is a reliable means of authenticating the substance and determining the dosage. Products from a licensed seller will include a description of the content.
- In the homecare setting nursing professionals must have access to the client's private residence by way of invitation. The invitation can be through direct communication, in writing or implied through actions (nodding, or gesturing for the nursing professional to enter the home). When the invitation has taken place the nursing professional can provide nursing services (CNPS, 2018).
- You must follow your respective medication and documentation standards.

Administration to minors

- With respect to administration of medical cannabis to minors, in addition to the above considerations, nursing professionals need to consider the applicable laws, rules, standards of practice, and employer policies governing consent and capacity of the minor (CNPS, 2018).

Administration of Medical Cannabis Produced by the Client or Designate

Nursing professionals may be requested to administer or assist with administration of cannabis that has been produced by the client or a designate. The nursing professional must consider the risks associated with administering any client supplied medication, including medical cannabis, and should take reasonable steps to ensure the integrity and safety of medical cannabis including documentation of the steps taken. Nursing professionals must also consult employer policy relating to the administration of medical cannabis which is produced by the client or designate.

Self-Administration of Medical Cannabis

When the client wishes to self-administer medical cannabis, the nursing professional must assess the client's capacity (e.g., judgment, memory, understanding, functional ability) to establish and document a plan for self-administration. This plan should include the provision of all relevant knowledge (e.g., dose, frequency and route, expected outcomes, potential adverse effects, and ways to monitor the expected and unexpected effects of the medical cannabis).

Clients should be assessed regularly for their capacity to self-administer medical cannabis or other medications. As with all assessments, these must be documented appropriately according to employer policy.

Nursing professionals should be familiar with employer policies (e.g. restrictions on practice, and documentation) related to self-administration of any medication including medical cannabis.

For Further information related to medication administration see:

- [Medication Administration Guidelines \(ANBLPN\)](#)
- [Medication Administration Standards \(NANB\)](#)

Organizational Policy and Procedure

The responsibility for caring for the client authorized to use medical cannabis is a shared responsibility between nursing professionals and authorized prescribers. The employer is responsible to develop and implement policies based on best evidence to support nursing professionals to meet their Standards of Practice and the requirements of the *Cannabis Regulations*.

The Associations recommend employers develop and maintain policies specific to (not an exhaustive list):

- Authorized source of the medical cannabis;
- Administration and assistance with administration of cannabis;
- Use of client's own medical cannabis;
- Storage and disposal of medical cannabis; and
- Managing clients who choose to smoke medical cannabis.

Although federal legislation has given legal authority to administer cannabis, every employer has the ability to further restrict an employee's involvement in these activities. Nursing professionals must be mindful and aware of any employer policies or guidelines that would prohibit them from participating in activities relating to medical cannabis (CNPS, 2018).

Conclusion

Nursing professionals providing care to clients who are, or are interested in, using medical cannabis must have knowledge of the treatment, respect client diversity, the client's right to informed decision-making and ensure there is appropriate employer policy. This guideline, in addition to consultation and support from ANBLPN or NANB Consultants, can help nursing professionals meet their Standards of Practice and provide safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing care to residents of New Brunswick.

If you have additional questions, please call a Consultant at 1.800.942.0222 (ANBLPN) and 1.800.442.4417(NANB).

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