



Nurses Association
OF NEW BRUNSWICK

PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Resolving Professional Practice Issues



Mandate

Regulation for safe, competent, and ethical nursing care.

Under the [Nurses Act](#), the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) is legally responsible to protect the public by regulating members of the nursing profession in New Brunswick. Regulation makes this profession, and nurses as individuals, accountable to the public for the delivery of safe, competent, and ethical nursing care.

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Acknowledgements

Elements of this document have been adapted from the Nova Scotia College of Nursing [Resolving Professional Practice Issues – Practice Guideline \(2020\)](#), and the Saskatchewan Registered Nurse Association [Resolving Professional Practice Issues: A Toolkit for Registered Nurses \(2019\)](#).

For this document, the term “nurses” refers to all NANB members, including graduate nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.



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Introduction

Nurses are accountable and responsible for making decisions that are consistent with safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical practice. At the same time, nurses face diverse and complex issues that can impact nursing practice and place clients at risk. Given this environment, nurses and employers have an obligation to advocate for conditions that support ethical nursing practice, including quality practice environments (CNA, 2017).

This practice guideline provides a framework to assist nurses and employers in resolving professional practice issues (PPIs).

Professional Practice Issues

A PPI is defined as: any situation in the workplace that has, or could, place clients at risk and/or interfere with the nurse's ability to practice in accordance with the *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*, the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*, the *Nurses Act*, workplace policies, procedures or other relevant standards, guidelines, and legislation.

Professional Practice Issue:

Any situation in the workplace that has, or could, place clients at risk and/or interfere with the nurse's ability to practice in accordance with the *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*, the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*, the *Nurses Act* or other legislation, workplace policies, procedures or other relevant standards and guidelines.

Employment or labor relation issues, personal problems in the workplace or performance issues can be mistaken for PPIs. The difference is that PPIs have an impact on client safety or nursing practice while employment issues relate to the employment relationship (such as: tardiness, absenteeism, staff ratios, dress code violations, denial of time off). See Table 1 for examples of common PPIs.

A PPI is generally beyond the ability of an individual nurse to resolve independently and requires collaborative resolution within the workplace.

Table 1: Examples of common PPIs

- Lack of support for nurses to meet their Standards of Practice or Code of Ethics.
- Working with limited resources, including lack of appropriate supplies/equipment, and/or lack of access to health care professionals to meet client care needs.
- Unsafe, non-compassionate, unethical or incompetent practice of another nurse or health care provider.
- Lack of written policies/leadership.
- Guidelines / policies not meeting best practices.
- Decisions/practices/ directives or directions that pose a risk or have a negative impact on safety, well-being and/or dignity of persons receiving care, or are not in the client's best interest.
- Inadequate communication/documentation systems to support decision-making about client care.
- Conflict between care providers.



Professional Practice Expectations

The following indicators of the [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#) guide decision-making when addressing PPIs:

- Nurses recognize and take action in situations where client safety is potentially or actually at risk.
- Nurses advocate for and contribute to quality professional practice environments.¹

These expectations are also echoed in the [Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#):

- “Nurses question, intervene, report, and address unsafe, non-compassionate, unethical, or incompetent practice or conditions that interfere with their ability to provide safe, compassionate, competent, and ethical care; and they support those who do the same” (p. 8).
- “Nurses advocate for persons receiving care if they believe the health of those persons is being compromised by factors beyond their control, including the decision-making of others” (p. 11).

These expectations apply to all nurses in every role and setting. Being aware of a professional practice issue and choosing not to take action can be considered a failure to report which is a violation of the standards of practice, the code of ethics and is considered professional misconduct (NANB, 2021).

It is expected that employers:

- examine situations and work with nurses to resolve problems, once they have been informed about them; and
- provide necessary resources and support so that nurses can meet their standards of practice.

Resolving Professional Practice Issues Framework

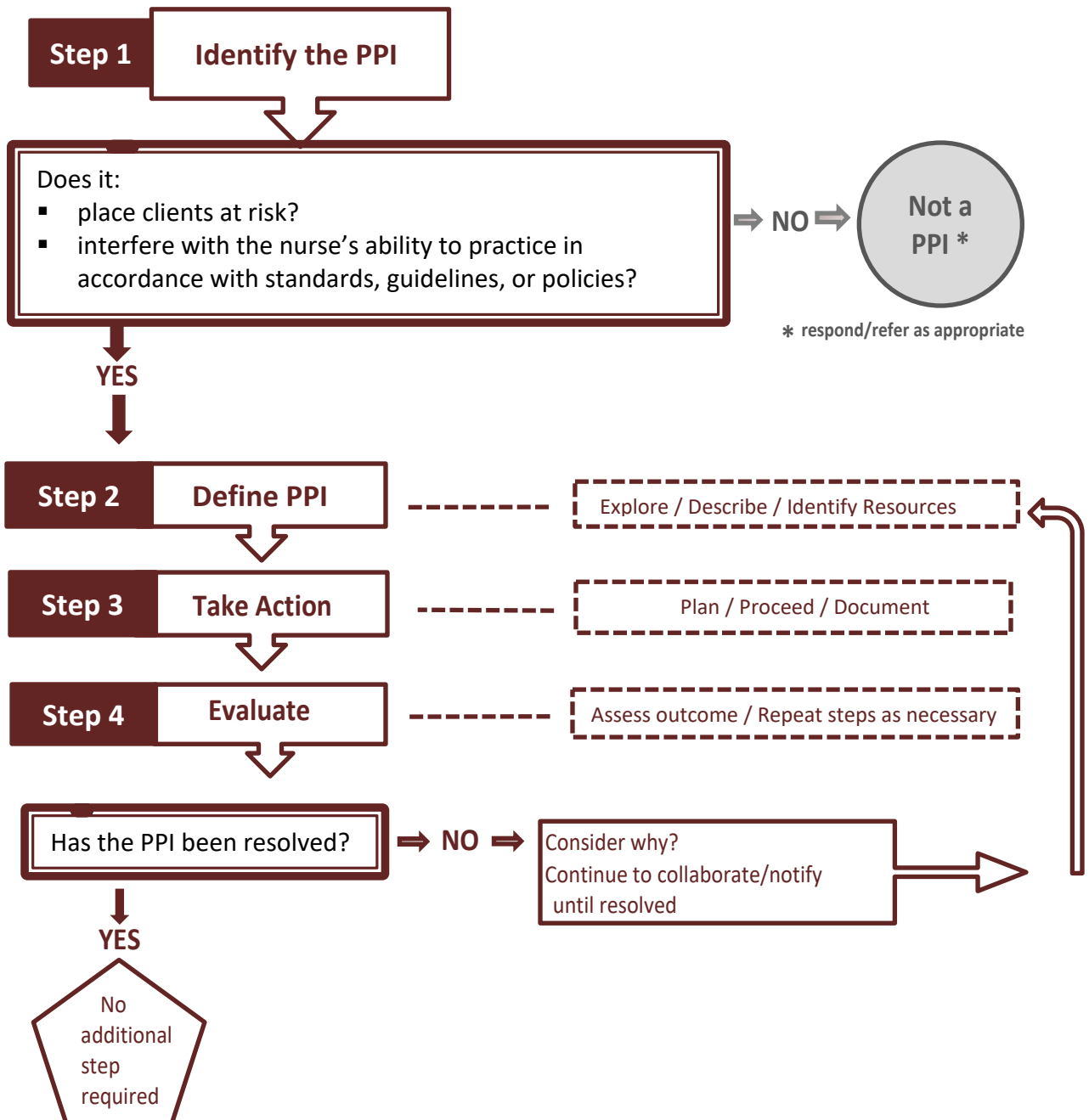
The framework provides guidance to identify and resolve PPIs in any context of practice by following the four-step process outlined in Figure 1. Each step is explained in more detail in the document. In addition to utilizing this framework, nurses should also refer to employer guidelines and/or policies related to resolving PPI in the employment setting if applicable.

¹ A quality professional practice environment is a practice environment that has the organizational and human support allocations necessary for safe, competent and ethical nursing care (CNA,2017).



If the PPI involves conduct that requires reporting, the duty to report obligations must be respected as outlined in the [Practice Guideline: Duty to Report](#).

Figure 1: Resolving Professional Practice Issues Framework



A tool to assist in applying these 4 steps is available in Appendix A.

STEP 1: Identify the PPI

Assessing a situation to identify whether it is a PPI is the first step to facilitating an effective resolution. To determine if the situation, action, or behavior is a PPI, ask the following questions:

- Does it place clients at risk?
- Does it interfere with the ability to practice in accordance with the *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses, Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*, nursing legislation, guidelines or employer policies and procedures?

If the answer to these questions is **NO**, the issue is likely not a PPI. Address the issue as deemed appropriate. If the answer to one of these questions is **YES**, you may have a PPI. Proceed to **STEP 2**.

If there is an imminent or immediate risk to client safety as a result of any PPI, steps to ensure client safety must be taken immediately and management notified.

STEP 2: Define the PPI

a) Explore and describe the issue

Clearly defining the PPI is critical to its resolution. Taking time to reflect on the issue objectively, with the following questions, will help to gain insight and an understanding of the situation:

- If there is a risk to the client, what is the risk?
- If it interferes with the ability to practice, at which level (Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, employer policies and procedures) and how?
- What are the contributing factors (refer to Table 2)?
- Is this a new or recurring PPI? If recurring, why?

Accountability	Not accepting accountability for client outcomes
Employer policies/procedures	None available to provide direction in specific situation
Communication	Inappropriate or no communication
Physical resources	Not having appropriate supplies to meet care needs
Competency	Not having required competencies to care for client(s)
Responsibility	Not accepting responsibility for actions or inactions
Ethical/Legal	Moral distress related to the issue What is happening is illegal
Standards	Not being able to meet minimum standards of practice
Human Resources	Not having enough staff



Once the issue has been explored, develop a detailed description to assist in communicating it at the appropriate level and include

- An objective and factual description of the situation.
- The date, time, place, and people involved.
- How the issue affects or has affected the clients, nursing practice and/or the team; and
- The contributing factors.

b) Identify resources

Once there is a good understanding of the PPI, reflect on the knowledge and skills required to address it. The next step is to identify resources that could be helpful to resolve the PPI; refer to Table 3 for potential resources.

Nurses should follow internal policies and lines of authority within the organization as the first means to resolve issues and concerns.

Table 3: Potential Resources*	
*This list is not exhaustive. There may be other resources that are available and appropriate depending on the context of care, the PPI being addressed and the nurse's professional judgment.	
Internal	Colleagues, charge nurse, manager, clinical educators, a mentor, human resources, occupational health, professional practice leaders
External	NANB practice consultant, union representative ² , Canadian Nurses Protective Society, employee assistance program, education programs, Human Rights Commission
Resource documents	Standards of Practice, entry level competencies, <i>Nurses Act</i> , Code of Ethics, NANB practice documents, employer policies

STEP 3: Take Action

Once the PPI and resources to assist in its resolution have been identified, the next step is to prepare for and take action. The action will depend on the PPI, the level of support and the resources available.

It is important to note that incompetence, professional misconduct, conduct unbecoming the profession or incapacity should be reported to the NANB (or the appropriate regulator), refer to the [Practice Guideline: Duty to report](#) for more information.

a) Plan the approach

A planned approach is supportive, especially if the PPI involves many people or is challenging to

² The New Brunswick Nurses Union (NBNU) as developed a process for reporting workplace situations; for more information, please refer to the NBNU: <https://nbnu.ca/member-services/labour-relations/workplace-situation-reports/>

resolve. When developing a plan of action, the following steps can be applied:

- Brainstorm possible solutions to resolve the PPI
- Determine the potential positive and negative outcomes for each solution identified
- Decide which solution(s) could be the best approach
- Develop a plan outlining the actions to be taken and when the chosen solution(s) will be implemented

b) Proceed with course of action

Once the action plan is outlined, it must be communicated utilizing the established lines of communication in the workplace so that it can be reviewed, and action taken to address the issue. Most of the time, the first communication will be with the nurse's direct manager or supervisor.

Suggested course of action to communicate the issue:

- Ask the appropriate person for a meeting to discuss the issue.
- Provide an objective, factual and detailed description³ of the PPI.
- Inform how the PPI poses risk for the clients and/or interferes with the ability to meet practice expectations.
- Offer possible solutions that could assist in resolving the PPI.
- Listen with an open mind to perspectives.
- Be prepared to work together to resolve the problem, recognizing that some negotiation and compromise may be necessary.
- Work together to confirm the next steps.

c) Document

It is important to keep personal records of all steps taken to resolve the PPI. This ensures there is an accurate account of events and demonstrates that professional obligations have been met.

If the PPI has had a direct impact on the client, refer to employer policy for guidance on documentation and reporting requirements; employers may have designated forms for this purpose (such as incident or other reports).

It is recommended to follow-up on discussions or meetings in writing, requesting a written response by a specific date, taking into consideration the degree of urgency of the problem. A copy of this correspondence should be kept. A template for correspondence is available in Appendix B.

³ Ensure privacy and confidentiality of client information.



STEP 4: Evaluate

The final step is to evaluate if the PPI has been resolved. Even though resolution may take time, the problem should be resolved as soon as possible to minimize risks to clients. To expedite the resolution, offer to continue to participate in resolving the problem.

If the PPI re-occurs in the future, it is important to notify appropriately.

a) Assess the outcome

It is acceptable to ask to be informed when the PPI has been addressed. If, after a reasonable time the PPI persists, it is important to continue to act until it is addressed. This may include:

- Requesting a meeting to follow-up on progress and determine when resolution can be expected.
- Discussing with the next level of management in the organization.
- Continuing to notify the appropriate people until the issue has been resolved.

Sending a follow-up to the initial correspondence is appropriate in this case; keep a copy of this correspondence.

b) Repeat steps as necessary

If during the evaluation phase it is determined that the PPI was not resolved, or resulted in a different outcome, taking a step back to consider why may be helpful, by reflecting on the following:

- Was the PPI clearly defined?
- Were the right people involved?
- Were the appropriate resources used to support the resolution?
- Is there evidence that appropriate steps were taken to resolve the PPI?
- Could anything have been done differently?

Once you have considered these questions, it may be determined that some steps need to be repeated. At this point it may be helpful to include higher levels of management. It is important to continue to work constructively toward resolution of the PPI.

By addressing PPIs, nurses ensure safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical practice and uphold the trust that the public holds for the nursing profession.

If you have any questions regarding professional practice problems, please contact NANB by e-mail at practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca.



Other Resources

The following resources may be of assistance in addressing professional practice issues:

- [Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#) (CNA, 2017)
- [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#) (NANB, 2019)
- [Standards for the Practice of Primary Healthcare Nurse Practitioners](#) (NANB, 2018)
- [Fact Sheet: Applying the Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses in my Practice](#) (NANB, 2019)
- [Practice Guideline Duty to Provide Care](#) (NANB, 2020)
- [Practicing with Limited Resources: A Guide for RNs and NPs](#) (NANB&NBNU 2019)
- [Practice Environments: Maximizing Outcomes for Clients, Nurses and Organizations - Joint Position Statement](#) (NANB, 2015)
- [Nurse as an Advocate](#) (CNPS, 2013)

References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *The Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*.

<https://www.cna-aiic.ca/en/nursing/regulated-nursing-in-canada/nursing-ethics>

Nurses Association of New-Brunswick. (2021). *Practice Guideline: Duty to Report*.

https://www.nanb.nb.ca/resource-library/?_rl_search=Practice%20Guideline%3A%20Duty%20to%20Report&_rl_cat_dropdown=nursing-practice

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2019). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*.

https://www.nanb.nb.ca/resource-library/?_rl_search=Standards%20of%20Practice%20for%20Registered%20Nurses&_rl_cat_dropdown=nursing-practice



Appendix A: Resolving PPIs Worksheet

This worksheet can be used to work through the resolution of PPIs, and to document the steps taken.

STEP 1	Identify the PPI	
STEP 1	Does it impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ client safety? ▪ ability to practice? 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No *If yes, may have a PPI, proceed with following steps.
STEP 2	Define PPI	
STEP 2	Explore & Identify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk to client ▪ Impact on ability to practice ▪ Contributing factors ▪ Potential resources 	Detailed description:
STEP 3	Take Action	
STEP 3	Plan & Proceed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible solutions ▪ Potential outcomes ▪ Best approach ▪ Outline of actions ▪ Proceed with course of actions 	Document plan and actions:
STEP 4	Evaluate	
STEP 4	Assess outcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PPI resolved? ▪ If unresolved, why? 	PPI Resolved: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No * *If unresolved, identify next steps.

Appendix B: Template for Correspondence

Date (day/month/year)
Name / Title
Name of organization
Employer address

Dear **Name**:

This letter is in follow up to our discussion on **(date)** concerning the professional practice concern related to **(specify the situation)**. I have **observed -or- been witness to -or- experienced** the following **(detail the issue - be specific, objective, and factual, include exactly what happened)** on **(where, when, who was present/involved)**.

This is an **issue -or- recurring issue** which, if left unresolved, poses a risk to clients by **(provide details)**
-or-
compromises the ability to practice according to **professional standards/Code of Ethics/ workplace policy/procedure (specify which ones)** by **(specify and how they are impacted by the issue)**.

The possible resolutions discussed were **(specify)**.

I request **that action be taken to bring a quick resolution to this issue -or- that the Professional Practice Committee review and propose a solution to this problem -or- that this issue be investigated to prevent similar occurrences.**

I would appreciate a response by **(date)** relative to the resolutions taken to respond to my concerns.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. I look forward to the opportunity, where possible, to participate in the resolution of this professional practice issue.

Sincerely,
Name, Designation, Unit, Employer
Signature



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