



FAQ: Working with Nursing Students

In any practice setting, the primary responsibility of a registered nurse (RN) is to the client. RNs are responsible for assessing their clients, and establishing, executing and evaluating the plan of care. RNs are also responsible for assigning nursing activities in accordance with client needs and the competence of other providers, including nursing students.

“The primary responsibility for the assignment and care of the client remains that of the primary nurse to whom the client has been assigned” (Canadian Nurses Association, 2017, p.41).”

Nursing students learn from formal education, clinical practicums and informal sharing of knowledge from RN colleagues. As an RN, you have a professional and ethical obligation to support nursing students in providing safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care.

RNs are responsible for the overall care of the clients, however when working with nursing students, client care is shared. In clinical settings, nursing students are usually supervised by a clinical instructor who is responsible for assigning nursing tasks, providing support and supervising the nursing students. The primary RN upholds nursing standards by making themselves available to the students and clinical instructor for assistance or consultation with assigned activities. In order to provide a meaningful and positive learning experience, communication between the RN, the clinical instructor and the nursing student is key and should happen in a respectful and professional manner. Expected responsibilities regarding client care need to be clearly communicated and agreed upon by the RN, the clinical instructor and the student.

While the clinical instructor is responsible for the overall learning plan, the RN should understand the objectives of the clinical experience and the level of competence of the student (i.e., 1st year student vs 3rd year student). The nursing student and clinical instructor should have the opportunity to discuss with the RN the learning plan which will promote understanding and provide an opportunity for any clarification of responsibilities. The clinical instructor cannot be expected to be with all students at all times. RNs should contribute to student learning by including them in care experiences and sharing nursing knowledge.



In any learning experience, there is the risk of errors or omissions. To minimize those risks the RN, the clinical instructor and the nursing students need to have an open line of communication that will enable the RN to stay updated on the client's status. Nursing students are responsible for their own actions, including when they make an error. The RN working with the students is responsible for appropriate supervision of the students, including intervening with care as required, and adjustments to the care plan. Effective communication between all healthcare team members ensures a successful educational experience for the learner and the RN, while ensuring that the client receives safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care.

More information on supporting nursing students can also be found in the following documents:

- [Fact Sheet - Mentoring \(June 2021\)](#)
- [Managing Legal Risks in Preceptorships](#) (Canadian Nurses Protective Society, 2002)
- [Ethical Considerations in Relationships with Nursing Students](#) p. 41-42 (Canadian Nurses Association, 2017)
- [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#) (NANB, 2019)

To speak with an NANB Consultant about supporting nursing students, contact us at 1-800-442-4417 / 506-458-8731 or by email Practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca.

References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2019). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*. Fredericton, NB: Author.

Canadian Nurses Protective Society. (2002). *Managing Legal Risks in Preceptorships*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnps.ca/index.php?page=92>

"It is important to remember that each nurse is accountable for her or his own actions. This includes student nurses." *Canadian Nurses Protective Society, 2002*