Registered nurses are often required to communicate with clients and clients’ family members over the telephone. An RN who accepts a telephone call and provides consultation, information or counseling over the telephone establishes a duty of care or a therapeutic relationship with the caller. RNs in this nurse-client relationship must adhere to The Registered Nurses Act, the Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses and the Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses.

The RN is responsible and accountable for the information obtained and provided during a telephone consultation. Providing telephone advice without face-to-face contact and basing an assessment on information from the client or a third party that may be inaccurate or incomplete makes this a high risk practice. Having employer policies to support RNs in the provision of quality, consistent health-care information over the telephone can help mitigate the risk.

Effective policies include:
- the best interest of the client when being assessed by phone versus in-person,
- the client population and their unique needs, and
- availability of resources.

Policies must also address calls ended by the client before an RN is satisfied that the client’s concern or question has been properly addressed. In any practice setting, having a separate telephone line dedicated to that single purpose enhances the sharing of health information over the telephone. Telephone consultation involves:
- Knowledge of current evidence to inform nursing advice
- Excellent communication and advanced assessment skills
- Effective crisis intervention skills
- Judgment and critical thinking ability
- Knowing the resources that are available to you
- Knowledge of the client population and current community resources
- A professional attitude of sensitivity and respect
- Helping clients identify and prioritize their needs
- Sharing information with clients
- Making safe, effective and appropriate recommendations in a time-limited interaction
- Contracting and making referrals
- Documentation

Documentation proves an RN provided nursing care during a consultation over the telephone. It also promotes continuity of care and meets requirements of the legal record. Documentation is crucial and should include the:
- date and time of the call,
- name of the caller,
- telephone number and address of the caller,
- information received,
- advice or information an RN provides,
- any referral and follow up information, and
- inclusion of these notes in the main client record.
The client record is the permanent record of the nursing care provided, regardless of whether the care was provided in person or through telephone consultation. Employers should:

- Collaborate with RNs and other health-care professionals to develop policies regarding the provision of health information over the telephone
- Establish and maintain systems to monitor outcomes, use of resources and workload required for telephone consultation
- Provide RNs with education, evidenced-informed protocols, reference materials and equipment (e.g. dedicated telephone line) to support them in telephone consultations
- Have a documentation system to record client calls that occur after a client is discharged from a unit or program
- Provide a physical environment that ensures privacy for the consultation to occur

**Telephone Consultation Outside of Manitoba**

RNs in Manitoba who provide telephone consultations to clients outside the province must consider a number of items, including:

- Being on the register with the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba
- Contacting the RN regulator in the other province or territory to see if registration is required in a client’s jurisdiction before giving advice
- Being accountable to the jurisdiction where the RN is located and registered. This means an RN must tell the caller their:
  - full name
  - professional designation
  - registering body
  - contact information

**Resources**


*Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*

*Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*

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*For more information please contact our practice and standards team at 204-774-3477 ext. 301 or 800-665-2027 (Manitoba toll-free).*

This publication is provided for general information. For more specific information see our *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*, the Canadian Nurses Association *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* and the *Registered Nurses Act and Regulations*.

Our publications are available on our website at [www.crnm.mb.ca](http://www.crnm.mb.ca)