



College of
Registered Nurses
of Manitoba

Complementary and Alternative Health Care

Complementary and alternative health care may be part of a client's care choices yet clients may be reluctant to share this information. While some complementary and alternative health-care interventions are considered mainstream, not all have a scientific basis. Because of this, it may be unclear how the intervention works, its indicators for use and possible side effects. The impact on the client's health status may be unpredictable. RNs must take steps to ensure that they meet the Practice Expectations while supporting the client to make informed decisions to receive complementary and alternative health care as part of the overall plan of care.

Applying the Standards of Practice when Recommending, Incorporating or Providing Complementary and Alternative Health Care

Client-Centered Practice

RNs use the nursing process to assess client needs, taking into consideration their wishes, concerns, values, priorities, perspectives, strengths and goals as well as available evidence to determine a plan of care. RNs support clients to make informed decisions about their care including the use of complementary and alternative health-care options.

When a client communicates their use of complementary or alternative health-care options, you should seek information to understand and evaluate the intervention

within the plan of care, exploring the client's views and supporting an informed choice. There may be times when you choose not to recommend, incorporate or provide the intervention due to the risk for harm to the client. When this occurs, you must clearly document and communicate the reason for the decision to the client, the health-care team and their supervisor as appropriate.

Professional Practice

When supporting the client in decision making and self-management of their care, you need to demonstrate evidence-informed decision making. To do this, use evidence-based resources to ensure sufficient knowledge of

- actions
- effects
- risks
- benefits of the intervention within the context of the client diagnosis and the plan of care

If you don't have sufficient knowledge of these items, consult or refer as necessary.

You must be able to determine the ongoing appropriateness of performing the activity and must be competent to assess, perform and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in relation to client goals of care. Nurses must be able to identify when additional skill, knowledge or expertise is needed and ensure a plan is in place to manage potential outcomes of the intervention.

As an RN you may not perform an intervention::

- that you are not authorised and/or competent to perform
- if you cannot demonstrate accountability to the practice expectations
- when the risks outweigh any potential benefits to the client

Collaborative Care

RNs collaborate with the health-care team, which includes providers of complementary and alternative health-care, to develop a plan of care reflective of safe, competent, compassionate and ethical client-centred care. You must also refer or consult as necessary to ensure informed decision making and competent care. RNs are expected to document all information relevant to the plan of care including complementary and alternative health-care discussions, interventions, consults and referrals.

Ethical Practice

RNs apply a number of ethical values when incorporating complementary and alternative health-care options into the plan of care.

Promoting and Respecting Informed Decision-Making

RNs provide clients with the information they need to make informed and autonomous decisions related to their health and well-being. RNs assist clients to make informed decisions by sharing information related to actions, effects, risks and benefits, alternative options, the right to refuse and possible outcomes of the complementary or alternative care option in the context of the plan of care. They respect the competent client or their decision-maker's informed choices.

Promoting Health and Well-Being

RNs seek to maximize the client's health status and well-being through conventional, complementary and alternative health care. Nurses collaborate with others to maximize health benefits, recognizing and respecting the knowledge, skills and perspectives of all.

Non-maleficence

RNs have an obligation to avoid harming a client. An RN may not recommend, incorporate or perform a complementary or alternative intervention when the risks outweigh any potential benefits to the client.

Providing Safe, Compassionate, Competent and Ethical Care

RNs have a duty to provide safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care. When an RN experiences value conflicts related to complementary and alternative health care practices, nurses utilise an ethical decision making framework and seek assistance and support from the health-care team to promote ethical decision-making. When needed, RNs transfer care to another provider to facilitate the continuity of safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care.

Promoting Justice

RNs do not discriminate on the basis of a person's race, ethnicity, culture, political and spiritual beliefs, social or marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, health status, place of origin, lifestyle, mental or physical ability, socio-economic status, or any other attribute.

Being Accountable

RNs are accountable for their practice and must follow all laws, standards, practice directions, ethical values and employer policies when recommending, incorporating or providing complementary and alternative health-care.

Does the provision of complementary or alternative care interventions count as nursing practice?

Performing a complementary or alternative intervention does not itself constitute nursing practice. In order for an individual performing a complementary or alternative intervention to be considered practicing nursing they must:

- be registered with the College
- be acting within the scope of practice of the membership class for which they are registered and adhere to any required authorisation mechanisms and employer policies
- use the nursing process to establish, maintain and evaluate a nursing plan of care
- meet the expectations outlined in the standards of practice, code of ethics and any other applicable practice directions

Scenario

Complementary and Alternative Health

Patricia West is an RN who works in a chemotherapy clinic; she recently met Barbara a client who has been receiving chemotherapy for breast cancer at the clinic. Today Barbara tells Patricia she has also been receiving large doses of Vitamin C from a Naturopath. Patricia inquires a bit further to determine how often Barbara is receiving the vitamin C, if she shared this information with her physicians and pharmacist and how and why Barbara chose this treatment.

Barbara discloses she chose this treatment because she has a very good friend who was treated with Vitamin C along with chemotherapy and her friend is now cancer free. She also has two insurance companies covering the cost and she wants to have some sense of control by choosing a treatment.

Patricia reviews the literature in peer-reviewed journals on large doses of Vitamin C and finds the evidence is inconclusive in the benefits or harm. Patricia understands it is important for her to support the client in the self-management of their health by providing information to make informed decisions and sharing her nursing perspective.

Patricia shares the importance of everyone involved in the care communicating and sharing information. She also indicates there could be a potential interaction between the chemo and vitamin C or some other medications the client may be taking. She wants to include everyone in the circle of care and asks for Barbara's permission to share her alternative care treatments with the rest of the team and to setup up regular communication between practitioners as part of the plan of care

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Discussion

Patricia is meeting the standards by sharing her perspective of the importance of communication among the health care team and supporting Barbara in the self-management of her health care.

She also recognized when and where she needed more information about an alternative therapy she was not aware of to make an informed decision, demonstrating the nursing process.

Glossary

Complementary And Alternative Health Care:

Modalities or interventions used to address clients' health needs across the continuum of health care. Complementary practices are used alongside the conventional health-care system while alternative practices are used in place of conventional health-care practices.

Plan of Care: A written guideline for client care that documents the client's health care needs. It includes assessment data, list of problems and therapies as well as expected criteria used to evaluate care.

Resources

College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba

- [Entry-Level Competencies for RNs](#)
- [Standards of practice for RNs](#)

[2017 Edition Code of Ethics for RNs](#) (Canadian Nurses Association)

[Practice Guideline: Complementary Therapies](#) (College of Nurses of Ontario)

[Client Centred Care](#) (Registered Nurses Association of Ontario)

[Informed Consent](#) (Manitoba Provincial Health Ethics Network)

[Complementary therapies](#) (Canadian Nurses Protective Society)

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