



Registered Nurse Responsibilities Related to Professional Practice Issues

Purpose

The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (the College) exists to serve and protect the public interest to achieve the outcome of accountable, quality, professional nursing practice. To that end, the Practice Direction: Practice Expectations for Registered Nurses requires that registered nurses promote a practice environment that supports responsibility, accountability, professional development, and respect by:

- a. Identifying issues which could have an injurious effect on clients or others, and
- b. Participating in resolving professional practice issues that interfere with their ability to practice according to the College regulations, practice expectations, practice directions, Code of Ethical Conduct, and other provincial and federal legislation.

This guidance document will support registrants in meeting these practice expectations.

Professional Practice Issues

A professional practice issue is any issue or situation that:

- compromises client care/service by placing a client at risk; and/or
- affects a registered nurse's ability to provide care consistent with College regulations, Practice Directions, Code of Ethical Conduct, and other provincial and federal legislation.

Examples of a professional practice issue include:

- a registered nurse is noted to not be following a facility policy or is conducting themselves in a way that does not meet their practice expectations,
- a registered nurse is practicing when they are impaired or unfit,
- a registered nurse is communicating disrespectfully or threateningly; harming their professional relationships or team dynamics,
- a registered nurse is doing something that harms or risks harming a patient,
- a registered nurse is doing something that makes it difficult for other registered nurses to meet the practice expectations, or
- a facility policy, procedure, or process is making it difficult for a registered nurse to meet their practice expectations.

When a registered nurse encounters a professional practice issue, the following steps can be helpful in responding to it.

1) Gather information about the professional practice issue

Encountering a professional practice issue can cause frustration, anxiety, and confusion, all of which can cloud objectivity and result in incorrect assumptions. When possible, thoroughly consider the issue before acting. These suggestions will assist with that process:

- It may be helpful to review policies, procedures, processes, and standards that you believe are involved, and understand the expectation you believe is not being met. Is there a policy or process that is contributing to this professional practice issue?
- If other team members have been affected by the professional practice issue, it may be helpful to ask for their perspective.
- In some cases, you may require assistance from others to understand the professional practice issue. RNs are encouraged to use all available resources to understand the professional practice issue.
- Consider any circumstances when the professional practice issue has impacted or nearly impacted patient care. Consider if it is likely to reoccur, and if so, when. Assess the extent of the problem and how urgent it is that a solution be identified.
- When seeking clarity from a colleague about a concern with their practice or decision making, approach them with a genuine desire to understand. Use prompts like “Help me to understand why you made that decision?” “Take me through the reasons why you felt that course of action was necessary”, or “I don’t think I would have made the same decision you did, what am I missing?”

2) Frame the information using the practice expectations, and the impact it is having on clients

Managing professional practice issues will require the RN to communicate the professional practice issues to others on their team. To do that effectively, frame the professional practice issue in terms of practice expectations, and patient impact.

When framing the professional practice issue, consider including the following:

- a description of the professional practice issue, in as much detail as possible,
- a description of the impact the professional practice issue is having on patients and an assessment of how likely it is to happen again,
- a description of which practice expectations or standards are not being met, and
- a description of the impact the professional practice issue is having on the functioning of teams, individuals, and yourself.

The following are examples of how professional practice concerns may be framed:

“Yesterday my colleague did not document or report the care he had provided to the patient in room 5. As a result, I was unaware of critical details, and almost made a mistake that would have harmed the patient. I do not think he met the Practice Expectations related to communication and documentation.”

“My facility has implemented a new electronic patient record and I no longer have access to view diagnostic imaging results. I need access to the diagnostic imaging results to meet my practice expectations including the requirement that I assess my patient, develop a plan of care, and evaluate outcomes. Without this information, I worry I will miss something.”

“I have noticed that my colleague is behaving differently at work. I worry about their fitness to practice and ability to provide safe care.”

3) Take action to resolve the professional practice issue

Professional practice issues which pose an immediate risk to patient safety must be addressed immediately. Other professional practice issues may require more time for consideration.

How and when you will act will depend on:

- the seriousness of the professional practice issue and the risk it poses to patient safety,
- your employer’s policies and processes related to occurrence/near-miss reporting, conflict resolution, and respectful workplace, and
- your relationship with the person/people involved.

When possible, work to resolve the issue directly with the person involved, using a constructive and collaborative approach. In most circumstances, approaching a colleague directly about a professional practice issue is sufficient to resolve the issue. Ask to discuss the matter with the person privately, inform them of the concern using the framing you established previously, offer suggestions, and plan with the person to ensure the professional practice issue is resolved.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to escalate the professional practice issue to someone with supervisory or managerial oversight. In these circumstances, approach the person with supervisory or managerial oversight, inform them of the concern using the framing you established previously, detail the steps you have taken to resolve the professional practice issue to date, and offer any suggestions for improvement that you have. It may be necessary for the registered nurse to follow up with their manager or supervisor or escalate the concern to someone with a higher level of supervisory oversight until a response is received.

In some circumstances, RNs may also need to report a professional practice issue directly to the regulator. See the College’s [Duty to Report](#) document and reach out to a Quality Practice Consultant promptly if you have questions about your duty to report.

Some professional practice issues may be easily resolved with a conversation. Others, especially those that involve departments, resources, processes, and policies, will require planning and collaboration by leaders, teams, and individuals. In all circumstances, registered nurses are required to participate in resolving professional practice issues that interfere with their ability to practice according to the College regulations, practice expectations, practice directions, the Code of Ethical Conduct, and other provincial and federal legislation.

Efforts to resolve professional practice issues continue until the professional practice issue is resolved. Some professional practice issues can be resolved immediately, while others may take significantly more time. RNs are encouraged to evaluate and re-evaluate until confident the professional practice issues are resolved.

4) Document

Registered Nurses need to understand and comply with all incident/near-miss reporting requirements that apply to their practice setting.

In addition to this, it is recommended that registered nurses keep detailed records of any attempts they have made to resolve professional practice issues. This record will assist registered nurses to recall what steps they have taken to manage the professional practice issue and will allow registered nurses to demonstrate how they met their own professional obligations, if required.

When deciding how to document efforts to resolve professional practice issues, consider the following:

- the patient record is not an appropriate place to document the resolution of professional practice issues,
- ensure any records comply with laws, rules, regulations, and policies pertaining to confidentiality and protection of personal health information,
- in many practice settings, emails, or memorandums may be used to document discussions about professional practice issues between registered nurses and managers or supervisors. When drafting this correspondence, include the following:
 - a description of the professional practice issue, with as much detail as possible, including dates and times,
 - how the professional practice issue has impacted patient care and which practice standards apply,
 - any attempts that have been made to correct the professional practice issue,
 - any suggestions for improvement, and
 - a request or plan for follow-up.

The following is an example of an email that may be used to document a discussion about resolution of a professional practice issue:

Good afternoon, [Manager],

Thank you for meeting with me this morning (April 25, 2024, at 0900h) to discuss my concern.

As discussed:

- The hospital's new electronic patient record does not permit me access to view my patients' diagnostic imaging results. I followed up with IT support and the educator, and they have confirmed that I do not have the ability to review those results.*
- This change has made it difficult for me to meet my practice expectations including the requirements that I assess my patient, develop a plan of care, and evaluate outcomes. I worry that, without this access, I may miss important information and may make a mistake.*
- I know that nurses at other hospitals have access to diagnostic imaging results and I would suggest that we inquire with those facilities about how they have set up their patient record.*
- You stated that you would review this concern and get back to me when I am next at work, on Monday, April 29, 2024.*

I look forward to speaking with you.

[Registrant].

Resources

For a complete list of practice directions and support documents visit the [CRNM Resource Library](#).

For more information about when report to the College is required, please review [Duty to Report](#).

References

Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2018) A [Toolkit for Resolving Professional Practice Issues](#).

College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (2025). [Code of Ethical Conduct](#)

College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba. (2022). [Practice Direction: Practice Expectations for RNs](#).

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