



Sampling: Distribution of Medication Samples to Clients

Applying the Code of Ethical Conduct

Be aware of the impact of reciprocity bias and the potential for a real or perceived conflict of interest with sampling.

Purpose

The purpose is to provide information about the application of the Code of Ethical Conduct Nurses for RN(NP)'s who may consider distributing samples of medications.

Introduction

The public expects ethical and competent service from RN(NP)s. Trustworthiness develops when RN(NP)s act with integrity and trust is an essential factor for clients to work effectively with care providers.

CRNM expects RN(NP)s meet all Practice Directions including the practice expectations for RNs and RN(NP)s. This also includes the expectation to practice in accordance with the *Code of Ethical Conduct*.

Medication sampling, also known as 'drug sampling' or simply 'sampling' refers to the practice of giving a client a medication sample that was provided to the practitioner by a pharmaceutical company at no-charge. Sampling is a tool for pharmaceutical marketing and promotion.

Anyone considering the use of medication samples in their practice must be cognizant of the impact of reciprocity bias and the potential for a real or perceived conflict of interest.

The *Food and Drug Regulations (Distribution of Drugs as Samples)* lists RN(NP)s as practitioners who can distribute samples. These regulations state that an RN(NP) can sign an order for a sample drug then receive the sample from a pharmaceutical company for subsequent distribution to a client. This order to receive a sample may be repeated, but not for longer than six months total.

Controlled drugs and substances, as specified in the *Narcotic Control Regulations*, or drugs specified in the *Cannabis Regulations* cannot be distributed as samples.

Note that RNs and RN(AP)s are not specified as practitioners who can distribute medication samples. For information or direction re: supplying medications, refer to the Practice Direction [Rural, Remote and Underserved Populations: Access to Prescribed Medications](#).

Consider these principles before distributing a sample:

Principle 1 Respect clients' dignity

Work collaboratively with clients, being sensitive and respectful to addressing the clients' specific health care needs.

1. How can I ensure the client receive sufficient information to make informed decisions about their care after the drug sample is depleted?
2. How can I ensure that the client is informed that sampling contributes to increased cost of medications in the long-term?

Principle 2 Provide inclusive and culturally safe care by practicing cultural humility

Promote awareness of how power differentials, biases, values and beliefs impact drug sample decision-making.

3. How do your assumptions about a client's values, beliefs or financial situation impact your decision to provide a sample?

Principle 3 Provide safe, competent, and ethical care

Work within the limits of your scope of practice, education, and competence.

4. Have I ensured that I have the competence necessary to prescribe this medication and provide follow-up?
5. How will I document in the client's health care record to inform other health care providers that the client has received a medication sample(s)?
6. How will I document my clinical judgment in the client's health care record?

Principle 4 Work respectfully with the health care team

Be accountable to everyone on the team, building and maintaining respectful relationships.

7. Does distribution of a medication sample contravene employer policies?
8. How is the health care team kept apprised of sampling practice in the practice setting?
9. Can the sample be stored safely and securely in the practice setting?

Principle 5 Act with integrity in clients' best interests

Remain honest and fair striving to build a trustworthy, therapeutic, nurse-client relationship.

10. Is the medication sample likely to contribute towards harmful outcomes for the client or for the population as a whole?

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11. Will the sample decrease the client's long-term access to therapy and/or medications?
12. How is the medication sample influencing your choices?
13. How is the medication sample influencing the client's choices?

Principle 6 Maintain public confidence in the nursing profession

Portray respectful behaviour and show leadership.

14. How will medication samples influence policy decisions as a system or team-level?
15. Will this contribute to medication overuse or over-diagnosis? Will it potentially increase the use of inadequately tested medications, or medications with a worse side-effect profile?

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