



College of  
Registered Nurses  
of Manitoba

# Substance Abuse/Misuse

The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba is the professional regulatory body for registered nurses in Manitoba whose primary mandate is protection of the public interest. The role of the College is to promote safe, competent, ethical care by all RNs. RNs with substance abuse/misuse problems may jeopardize the safety of clients, themselves and other staff. Substance abuse/misuse problems can affect an RN's insight and judgment and their ability to maintain the appropriate practice expectations.

Addiction has been defined as an unhealthy relationship between a person and a mood-altering substance, experience, event or activity that contributes to life problems and their recurrence (AFM, 2000). Nurses who become addicted often begin misusing/abusing substances by self-medicating for emotional distress, post traumatic stress disorder, pain, fatigue or depression. They often hold demanding and responsible jobs and are bright, ambitious and respected. There are many interacting and cumulative factors that can contribute to substance abuse/misuse. The natural course of any substance abuse/misuse problem is different from one individual to another and variable over time. Once a level of dependent involvement becomes apparent, the natural course of development becomes less variable and more predictable (AFM, 2000). Addiction is an illness that is primary, progressive and chronic in nature and can be fatal if it is not treated.

Colleagues are the most likely to identify changes or problems in their colleague's nursing practice. RNs may be reluctant to report a situation due to an interpersonal relationship with the RN, protection of a friend from disciplinary action, potential harm if the RN reports the situation or fear of being wrong about what is occurring with the RN. As RNs, we are firstly responsible to our clients. If client care is jeopardized or clients are at risk, action must be taken and the situation reported.

To prevent harm and promote client safety it is all RNs' responsibility to report concerns regarding nursing practice to the supervisor/manager. The facts should be documented as fairly, objectively and completely as possible and in a timely manner to ensure accuracy. The focus of the documentation should be the RN's behaviours, the effects on the delivery of safe nursing care and the inability to meet the practice expectations. Documentation should be provided to the supervisor/manager. When there is reason to believe that the RN has demonstrated incapability or unfitness to practise nursing or is suffering from an ailment, which may cause a danger to the public, a colleague and/or supervisor has an obligation to report their concerns to the College under section 138(1) of *The Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA)*.

## Resources

There are resources available in Manitoba to assist RNs in their recovery. The following resources are available:

- The Addictions Unit at Health Sciences Centre may be used for initial inpatient rehabilitation.
- Addictions Foundation of Manitoba – for general inquiries call 204-944-6200, or for out of town inquiries call 866-638-2561 toll free or visit [www.afm.mb.ca](http://www.afm.mb.ca)
- Twelve-step programs – 204-942-0126
- Behavioural Health Foundation – 204-269-3430 or visit [www.bhf.ca](http://www.bhf.ca)
- Employee Assistance Program – 204-786-888 or 800-590-5553
- St. Raphael Wellness Centre – 204-956-6650 or visit [www.straphaelcentre.ca](http://www.straphaelcentre.ca)

## College Resources

- *Registered Nurses Responsibilities Related to Professional Practice Issues*
- *Complaints, Discipline & Appeals Process*
- *Practice Expectations for RNs*
- *Practice Expectations for RN(NP)s*
- *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*

Published: 07/2010

Revised: 05/2018

---

For more information please contact  
our professional conduct team at

**204-774-3477**

**800-665-2027 (Manitoba toll-free)**

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