



QUALITY PRACTICE
 A RESOURCE FOR EMPLOYERS OF NURSES

- 2 Nursing Footcare practice standard discontinued**
- 2 Verifying your nurses' membership status**
- 3 Practice Standards 101 — The basics for employers**
- 3 Employer sessions focus on LTC**
- 4 Ask CNO: Floating between units**
- 4 We Can Help**

Careers Section added to *The Standard*

A new career section for advertisers was launched in the March 2005 issue of *The Standard*, the College's membership journal. The new section allows readers to find career postings quickly and easily.

Employers seeking applicants for nursing-related positions can reach Ontario's 143,000 nurses by advertising career opportunities in this section.

For more information on advertising in *The Standard*, contact Karen Lorimer at Dovetail Communications by e-mail at klorimer@dvetail.com.

New guideline clarifies client care and workplace issues

Included with this issue of *Quality Practice* (QP) is the College's new *Refusing Assignments and Discontinuing Nursing Services* practice guideline. The guideline will assist nurses in making decisions about requests to work overtime, job action or strikes, and unsafe working conditions. It also instructs nurses and employers on how they can integrate the guidelines into their workplace environments. This guideline replaces the documents *Job Actions* and *Accountability of RNs and RPNs During a Work Stoppage*.

As part of its support of employers, CNO is providing a copy of new standards and guidelines to subscribers of QP. By being familiar with the standards under which nurses practise, employers can contribute to the development of supportive practice environments.

This document outlines 15 principles and key expectations nurses need to consider when making decisions around discontinuing nursing services. For example, nurses are not required to work overtime or extra shifts if they have not already accepted the client assignment. In the event of a strike, however, nurses are obligated to provide "essential services" to clients in emergency situations.

"The College's Practice Consultants receive frequent calls around these issues, and questions about whether refusing overtime or assignments constitutes abandonment," says Sharon Avey-Morrison, RN, a Practice Consultant at the College who participated in the development of the new guideline.

"In some situations, answers aren't readily apparent; however, this document provides a process for working through situations and applies the process to common scenarios nurses encounter."

Seeking answers

Nurses often ask what their regulatory and professional responsibilities are when accepting or refusing overtime. Are they obligated to accept additional shifts if a scheduled replacement doesn't arrive for work? What should they do if they are tired, but clients would be left without care if they don't stay? The new practice guideline will help nurses find answers to some of these questions.

Similar concerns arise when nurses are involved in job actions. What responsibilities do nurses have for clients when on strike? If other health care professionals are striking, and nurses feel unsafe about crossing the picket line, could this constitute abandonment of clients?

"While the College does not have a role in labour disputes, it does have a responsibility to ensure that nurses and nurse administrators fulfil their professional obligations to clients," says Michelle Cyr, RN, a College Practice Consultant and contributor to the new guideline.

"For example, nurses need to be aware of the College's practice standards during such situations, as well as the rights, obligations and privileges they have should they work in a unionized workplace. They need to exercise judgment when weighing their professional and personal obligations, and base decisions on what is in the best interest of clients."

continued on page 2

Nursing Footcare practice standard discontinued

Practice standards continually evolve to keep pace with rapid changes in the health care sector. To ensure that standards remain current, the College conducts routine reviews of all practice standard documents.

A recent review of the *Nursing Footcare* practice standard revealed that it contained outdated clinical and infection control information and that more relevant information is provided in other College documents.

In addition, a survey of stakeholders, including industry leaders and nurses who practice footcare, found that most no longer found the document useful. For these reasons, Council retired the standard at its December 2004 meeting.

College documents that may be helpful to facilities providing footcare include: the *Regulated Health Professions*

Act: Scope of Practice and Controlled Acts Model; Guide to Decide; Medication and Infection Prevention and Control. These documents are available free on the College Web site www.cno.org or through the Fast Fax service: 1 877 963-7502.

Specific up-to-date information about best practice is available through sources such as Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Clinical information can be found in nursing textbooks and procedure manuals, best-practice guidelines, literature and footcare courses.

For questions or concerns regarding this issue, contact a College Practice Consultant at 416 928-0900 ext. 2 or 1 800 387-5526.

Verifying your nurses' membership status

December, January and February are three of the busiest months at the College as more than 140,000 Ontario nurses renew their memberships. At this point in the year, everyone who is practising nursing should have their current Annual Payment Card (APC) from the College.

As an employer, you can do one of two things to verify that the nurses working in your facility are in good standing with the College. You can request to see your nurses' original APCs or, if you work in a larger facility with many nurse employees, you can take advantage of the College's time-saving Automated Annual Verification of Renewal (AAVR) system. Employers should follow up with nurses who are unable to produce a current APC when requested.

Confirming nurses registration status every year helps to prevent illegal

practitioners from gaining employment in Ontario. Illegal practitioners — individuals who claim to be nurses without College registration — pose a serious threat to public safety.

In addition, nurses who have not renewed their membership with the College at this late date are at risk of suspension. Once suspended for non-payment of fees, members are not entitled to practise until their registration is up-to-date. Nurses who continue to practise while under suspension face financial penalties when they re-establish their membership, and could face disciplinary action, as well. A list of nurses who have been suspended is posted on CNO's Web site each April.

For more information on the registration process, the AAVR, or to view the current suspension list, visit the employer section of CNO's Web site (www.cno.org).

New guideline

cont'd from page 1

Quality practice settings

CNO believes that, as partners in care delivery, nurses and employers should work together to build quality practice settings. All nurses are accountable to take action in situations where client care is compromised, and this includes identifying and addressing situations in which clients could be left without needed care.

The enclosed practice guideline includes strategies around care delivery processes, leadership, organizational supports and communication for employers to consider. For example, the guidelines suggest that nurses and employers work together to develop policies related to what nurses must do before leaving their shift when staff have not shown up to relieve them.

For additional free downloads of this practice guideline, visit the documents list on CNO's Web site at www.cno.org.

Practice Standards 101 — The basics for employers

One of the roles of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) is to set the standards under which all nurses in Ontario are expected to practise. CNO's practice standards contain definitive statements about nursing practice to guide nurses in their daily practice.

What are guidelines?

To support nurse employers, CNO is now including a copy of new or revised practice documents with *Quality Practice*. As an employer, you can demonstrate support for the nursing staff in your organization by developing a working knowledge of these documents. (If you are an employer and a nurse, it is imperative that you have a solid understanding of the standards.) If you are trying to become more knowledgeable about the College's other standards, where should you start?

To begin, CNO suggests obtaining a copy of the *Professional Standards* (Revised 2002; # 41006) and keeping it within reach at all times. This document is the seed from which the other practice standards have grown. It will provide you with information about the fundamentals of quality nursing practice – accountability, continuing competence, ethics, knowledge and knowledge application, leadership, and healthy nurse-client and professional relationships.

Promoting professional practice environments

CNO's practice standards were written with the intention that they be incorporated into workplace policies and procedures. A number of standards encourage employers to involve nurses in workplace decision-

making to enable nurses to meet or exceed CNO standards. CNO has included information and strategies to maintain professional practice environments that support nurses to practice within various standards. For example, the *Documentation* practice standard (#41001) includes seven descriptors of how practice settings can support nurses in accurate documentation. It offers specific strategies such as consulting with front-line nurses about equipment needs and providing nurses with the time to document their assessments, actions and client information. The *Medication, Restraints, Resuscitation, Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship*, and *Infection Prevention and Control* practice standards also have sections on quality practice settings that may be of interest to you in your role as a nurse employer.

CNO has made the practice standards widely available. All of the standards have been compiled into the *Compendium of Standards of Practice for Nurses in Ontario*. This publication is available for purchase in a binder format or individual documents can be downloaded for free on CNO's Web site (www.cno.org). Individual booklets can also be ordered by contacting CNO's Customer Service Centre (see page 4).

Research has shown that environments that support nurses in their professional practice promote better outcomes for clients. By educating yourself about the standards under which your nurses practice, you have taken the first step towards building an environment that supports professional practice and quality care by your facility's nursing staff.

Employer sessions focus on LTC

In 2005, the College continues to present its popular Employer Information and Consultation Sessions. These sessions were developed to provide an overview of College services and to consult with employers about issues they are facing.

The next session focuses on long-term care facilities. It is scheduled for May 3 in Sudbury at Cambrian College, Main Campus, 1400 Barrydowne Road from 1100–1600 hrs. Participants should register by April 26. The registration fee per attendee is \$80.25, which includes session materials, refreshments and lunch.

The agenda for these sessions is developed to meet the unique needs and interests of participants. Discussion topics scheduled include the following:

- practice setting realities in long term care;
- a review of CNO's consultation services;
- demystifying the reporting process;
- nursing human resources in long term care; and
- navigating CNO's Web site.

For more information or to register, visit www.cno.org.

Ask CNO: Floating between units

Q I am a nurse manager for two busy medical units. Our hospital is planning a restructuring process that will see the medical units consolidating with two general surgery units to form a medical/surgical program. The nursing staff will be expected to float among the four units as needed. This is an effort to accommodate variation in our census. Some nurses have expressed concern with this plan, stating they either haven't provided care to medical or surgical clients for some time. Some nurses have said they will refuse to float because they don't feel competent to provide the required care. I understand their anxiety, but am concerned that this attitude will affect morale. Can nurses refuse to float?

A Nurses have a professional obligation to provide only care they are competent to deliver. To do otherwise puts clients at risk and could expose nurses to allegations of professional misconduct. Similarly, administrators who are nurses have an obligation to not direct nurses to provide care they are not competent to provide. Nurses and administrators, therefore, share responsibility for resolving the competence issues related to floating and ensuring that clients receive safe care.

While nurses may not have experience meeting the specific care needs of both medical and surgical clients, they do have knowledge and competencies that are transferable across client care units. It is important for administrators and nurses to work together to identify the specific learning needs of nurses who are floating, and to develop a plan to address those learning needs. In the interim, if nurses must float they

should clearly identify the aspects of care they are competent to provide, as well as those they are not. The nurse and manager need to work with staff on the receiving unit to ensure appropriate accommodation and support for the nurse who is floating. This might involve adjusting the care delivery system from primary care to a more functional model for that shift.

Nurses are also accountable for maintaining competence relevant to their area of practice. This includes developing the necessary knowledge, skill and judgment to meet the needs of a changing or new client population.

As consolidation of your medical and surgical units has not yet occurred, there is still time to involve the staff nurses who will be affected by the change. Involving staff early can help ensure everyone is ready for the change, and can increase morale, strengthen team functioning and ultimately contribute to positive client outcomes.

We Can Help

Answering your call

Our Customer Service Centre and Practice Consultants answer calls from 0830 until 1700 hrs from Monday to Friday. Call 416 928 0900 (toll-free in Ontario at 1 800 387-5526). Using the automated system, choose your language of preference then select option "0" for Customer Service or ext. 2 to speak with a Practice Consultant.

Fast information

Obtain free publications quickly using CNO's FastFax service. Simply dial 1 877 963-7502 on your touch-tone phone and follow the recorded instructions. Within minutes the document will be transmitted to your fax machine. For a list of the English language documents, enter document #43000 when instructed. For French-language documents, enter #53000.

Visit the Web

Our Web site at www.cno.org provides a wealth of information for employers. Visit it regularly to keep informed.

College of Nurses of Ontario
101 Davenport Rd, Toronto ON M5R 3P1
www.cno.org

Telephone: 416 928-0900
Toll Free: 1 800 387-5526
Fax: 416 928-6507

Editor-in-Chief Cindy Campbell
Managing Editor Bill Clarke
Editorial Associate Taryn Nirenberg

Production Coordinator Susan Abraham
Layout Paul Brandeys

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