



Professional Standards, Revised 2002

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THE STANDARD OF CARE.

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Regulating nursing in the public interest

Professional Standards, Revised 2002 Pub. No. 41006

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Nursing standards are expectations that contribute to public protection. They inform nurses of their accountabilities and the public of what to expect of nurses. Standards apply to all nurses regardless of their role, job description or area of practice.

— **College of Nurses of Ontario**

Introduction

Professional Standards, Revised 2002 (Professional Standards) provides an overall framework for the practice of nursing and a link with other standards, guidelines and competencies developed by the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO). It describes in broad terms the professional expectations of nurses¹ and applies to all nurses, in every area of practice.

Professional Standards includes seven broad standard statements, a description of each statement and indicators that illustrate how the standard may be demonstrated. To help nurses in different practice areas apply the standards, there are indicators for all nurses and for those in administrative, educational and research positions. As well, three of the standards (Knowledge, Knowledge application and Leadership) have indicators for RNs and NPs.

The indicators used in this document are not a complete list, nor do they apply to all nurses at all times. As well, the seven standards are inter-related; an indicator used to illustrate one standard may also demonstrate the application of other standards. How a nurse demonstrates a standard is influenced by the nurse's level of competence, role, practice setting and the situation. It is expected that all nurses will meet the expectations of these professional standards and be able to articulate how they demonstrate the standards in their practice.

Guiding principles

The following principles guided the development of *Professional Standards*:

- in Ontario, nursing is one profession with two categories — RN (which includes NPs) and RPN;
- the foundational knowledge base of RNs and RPNs is different because of differences in basic nursing education;
- all nurses are accountable for their own decisions and actions and for maintaining competence throughout their career;
- clients² are the central focus of the professional services that nurses provide and as partners in the decision-making process, clients ultimately make their own decisions;
- the goal of professional practice³ is to obtain the best possible outcome for clients, with no unnecessary exposure to risk of harm; and
- all nurses continually enhance their knowledge through education, experience and self-assessment. Nurses can become experts in an area of practice within their category.

A standard is an authoritative statement that sets out the legal and professional basis of nursing practice.

All standards of practice provide a guide to the knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes that are needed to practise safely. They describe what each nurse is accountable and responsible for in practice. Standards represent performance criteria for nurses and can interpret nursing's scope of practice to the public and other health care professionals. Standards can be used to stimulate peer feedback, encourage research to validate practice and generate research questions that lead to improvement in health care delivery. Finally, standards aid in developing a better understanding and respect for the various and complementary roles that nurses have.

¹ In this document, *nurse* refers to a Registered Practical Nurse (RPN), Registered Nurse (RN) and Nurse Practitioner (NP).

² A client is a person with whom the nurse is engaged in a therapeutic relationship. In most circumstances, the client is an individual but the client may also include family members and/or substitute decision-makers. The client can also be a group (e.g., therapy), community (e.g., public health) or population (e.g., children with diabetes).

³ In this document *professional practice* is defined as the care and/or services that nurses provide to clients. Care/services is the process of working with clients to identify care needs, and to establish, implement and continually evaluate plans of care.

Standards

The seven standards are presented in alphabetical order. All standards have equal importance and are interconnected.

Accountability

Each nurse is accountable to the public and responsible for ensuring that her/his practice and conduct meets legislative requirements and the standards of the profession.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- identifying her/himself and explaining her/his role to clients;
- providing, facilitating, advocating and promoting the best possible care for clients;
- advocating on behalf of clients;
- seeking assistance appropriately and in a timely manner;
- sharing nursing knowledge and expertise with others to meet client needs;
- ensuring practice is consistent with CNO's standards of practice and guidelines as well as legislation;
- taking action in situations in which client safety and well-being are compromised;
- maintaining competence and refraining from performing activities that she/he is not competent in;
- taking responsibility for errors when they occur and taking appropriate action to maintain client safety;
- reporting to the appropriate authority any health care team member or colleague whose actions or behaviours toward clients are unsafe or unprofessional, or indicate abuse⁴, in accordance with applicable legislation, including (but not limited to):
 - the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*;
 - the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*;
 - the *Public Hospitals Act*, and
- reporting sexual abuse of a client by a regulated health professional to the appropriate regulatory college, as legislated in the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*.

Nurses are responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions. They're also accountable for conducting themselves in ways that promote respect for the profession. Nurses are not accountable for the decisions or actions of other care providers when there was no way of knowing about those actions.

In addition, a nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- ensuring that mechanisms allow for staffing decisions that are in the best interest of clients and professional practice;
- ensuring the appropriate use, education and supervision of staff;
- advocating for a quality practice setting that supports nurses' ability to provide safe, effective and ethical care; and
- creating an environment that encourages ongoing learning.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- ensuring the appropriate supervision of students;
- communicating the level of preparation of the student and the objectives of the learning experience;
- using standards of practice and evidence-based knowledge to educate students; and
- ensuring that nurses receive the appropriate education, support and supervision when acquiring new knowledge and skills.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- ensuring the safety and well-being of the client above all other objectives, including the search for knowledge.

⁴ Abuse means the misuse of the power imbalance intrinsic in the nurse-client relationship. It can also mean the nurse betraying the client's trust, or violating the respect or professional intimacy inherent in the relationship, when the nurse knew, or ought to have known, the action could cause, or could be reasonably expected to cause, physical, emotional or spiritual harm to the client. Abuse may be verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, financial or take the form of neglect. For a detailed explanation, read Appendix A in the *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship* practice standard at cno.org/standards.

Continuing Competence

Each nurse maintains and continually improves her/his competence by participating in the College of Nurses of Ontario’s Quality Assurance (QA) Program.

Competence is the nurse’s ability to use her/his knowledge, skill, judgment, attitudes, values and beliefs to perform in a given role, situation and practice setting. Continuing competence ensures

that the nurse is able to perform in a changing health care environment. Continuing competence also contributes to quality nursing practice and increases the public’s confidence in the nursing profession.

Participation in CNO’s QA Program helps nurses engage in activities that promote or foster lifelong learning. The program helps nurses maintain and improve their competence and is a professional requirement.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- assuming responsibility for her/his own professional development and for sharing knowledge with others;
- investing time, effort and other resources to improve knowledge, skills and judgment;
- engaging in a learning process to enhance her/his practice;
- participating in the College’s QA Program. Participation includes:
 - performing a self-assessment;
 - seeking peer input;
 - developing a learning plan;
 - implementing the plan; and
 - evaluating the outcomes of the plan;
- keeping records of participation in QA Program activities;
- providing colleagues with feedback that encourages professional growth;
- participating in Practice Assessment when selected;
- advocating for quality practice improvements in the workplace; and
- working together to create quality practice settings that promote continuing competence.

In addition, a nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- supporting nurses to become reflective practitioners;
- encouraging nurses to engage in ongoing learning;
- seeking opportunities for nurses to participate in continual learning activities;
- seeking opportunities to incorporate reflective practice into agency professional development systems; and
- advocating for a quality practice setting.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- supporting students and nurses in becoming reflective practitioners;
- developing, implementing and facilitating learning activities that help nurses enhance their practice; and
- supporting nurses in engaging in ongoing learning.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- encouraging the evaluation of practice through research; and
- communicating best-practice research findings to others.

Ethics

Each nurse understands, upholds and promotes the values and beliefs described in CNO's Ethics practice standard.

Ethical nursing care means promoting the values of client well-being, respecting client choice, assuring

privacy and confidentiality,⁵ respecting the sanctity and quality of life, maintaining commitments, respecting truthfulness and ensuring fairness in the use of resources. It also includes acting with integrity, honesty and professionalism in all dealings with the client and other health care team members.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- identifying ethical issues and communicating them to the health care team;
- identifying options to resolve ethical issues;
- evaluating the effectiveness of the actions taken to resolve ethical issues; and
- identifying personal values and ensuring they do not conflict with professional practice.

In addition, a nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- creating environments that promote and support safe, effective and ethical practice;
- valuing the time that's taken to resolve ethical issues;
- advocating for resources and establishing mechanisms to assist nurses in recognizing and resolving ethical issues;
- supporting nurses in developing skills to recognize

and manage ethical issues; and

- facilitating/advocating for nursing input on ethics committees.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- encouraging and supporting critical thinking and dialogue about ethical issues; and
- assisting nurses and students in identifying resources to improve recognition and resolution of ethical issues.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:⁶

- ensuring that the client has all the information necessary to make informed decisions;
- advocating for nursing involvement on ethical review boards;
- participating in the ethical review of research; and
- ensuring ethical guidelines are followed to protect research participants.

⁵ For more information, refer to the *Freedom of Information Protection of Privacy Act*.

⁶ Canadian Nurses Association. (1994). *Ethical Guidelines for Nurses in Research Involving Human Participants*.

Knowledge

Each nurse possesses, through basic education and continuing learning, knowledge relevant to her/his professional practice.

RNs, RPNs and NPs study from the same body of nursing knowledge. RPNs study for a shorter period of time than RNs and NPs. They have a more focused or basic foundation of knowledge in

clinical practice, decision-making, critical thinking, research and leadership. RNs and NPs study for a longer period of time to achieve a greater breadth and depth of knowledge in clinical practice, decision-making, critical thinking, research utilization, leadership, health care delivery systems and resource management. All nurses add to their basic education and foundational knowledge by pursuing ongoing learning throughout their careers.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- providing a theoretical and/or evidence-based rationale for all decisions;
- being informed and objective about the various nursing roles and their relationship to one another;
- being informed about nursing and its relationships in the health care delivery system;
- understanding the legislation and standards relevant to nursing and the practice area;
- understanding the knowledge required to meet the needs of complex clients;
- having knowledge of how bio-psychosocial needs and cultural background relate to health care needs;
- knowing where/how to access learning resources, when necessary;
- seeking and reviewing research in nursing, the health sciences and related disciplines;
- using research to inform practice/professional service; and
- being aware of how practice environments affect professional practice.

In addition, an RN or NP demonstrates the standard by:

- contributing to the generation of new professional knowledge through research;
- seeking and critiquing philosophical, theoretical and research-based literature in nursing, health care services, etc.; and
- using philosophy, theory and research to inform practice.

A nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- understanding how a practice environment can foster professional growth and improve professional practice;
- facilitating nurses to continually seek new knowledge;
- knowing how to access resources to enable nurses to provide the best possible care;
- critically evaluating research related to outcomes and advocating for its application in practice;
- using relevant leadership and management principles; and
- understanding and promoting nursing as as knowledge-based and research-informed profession.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- identifying and evaluating information sources that are useful for professional practice;
- promoting an environment that facilitates questioning and learning; and
- possessing/developing knowledge of teaching-learning theories and practices.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- identifying research methods useful to the nursing profession;
- identifying resources to answer research questions; and
- sharing knowledge gained through research.

Knowledge Application

Each nurse continually improves the application of professional knowledge.

The quality of professional nursing practice reflects nurses' application of knowledge. Nurses apply

knowledge to practice using nursing frameworks, theories and/or processes. They employ knowledge in the performance of clinical skills because the technical and cognitive aspects of care are closely related and cannot be separated.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- ensuring that practice is based in theory and evidence and meets all relevant standards/guidelines;
- assessing/describing the client situation using a theory, framework or evidence-based tool;
- identifying/recognizing abnormal or unexpected client responses and taking action appropriately;
- recognizing limits of practice and consulting appropriately;
- planning approaches to providing care/service with the client;
- creating plans of care that address client needs, preferences, wishes and hopes;
- using best-practice guidelines to address client concerns and needs;
- managing multiple nursing interventions simultaneously;
- evaluating/describing the outcomes of specific interventions and modifying the plan/approach;
- identifying and addressing practice-related issues; and
- integrating research findings into professional service and practice.

In addition, an RN or NP demonstrates the standard by:

- analyzing and applying a wide range of information using a variety of frameworks or theories that result in a global approach and creative solutions;
- anticipating and preparing for possible outcomes

by analyzing all influences;

- identifying a full range of options based on a depth and breadth of knowledge;
- creating comprehensive and creative plans of care that reflect the complexity of client needs;
- meeting client needs regardless of complexity and predictability;
- analyzing and interpreting unusual client responses; and
- evaluating theoretical and research-based approaches for application to practice.

A nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- creating practice environments that support quality nursing practice;
- establishing and maintaining communication systems to support quality service and research;
- supporting and contributing to practice environments that encourage learning, and the application of nursing knowledge and research; and
- articulating an evidence base for all decisions and measuring the impact on practice.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- planning and implementing creative learning opportunities for students/nurses;
- critically analyzing and evaluating nursing practice and education; and
- creating an environment where learning is encouraged.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- supporting and evaluating practice through research;
- facilitating the involvement of others in the research process;
- ensuring that high standards are used in the research process;
- communicating research findings to decision-makers and others;
- supporting and contributing to environments that encourage the application of research findings to professional practice;
- securing resources to explore nursing research; and
- fostering an atmosphere of inquiry.

Leadership

Each nurse demonstrates her/his leadership by providing, facilitating and promoting the best possible care/service to the public.

Leadership requires self-knowledge (understanding one's beliefs and values and being aware of how

one's behaviour affects others), respect, trust, integrity, shared vision, learning, participation, good communication techniques and the ability to be a change facilitator.⁷ The leadership expectation is not limited to nurses in formal leadership positions. All nurses, regardless of their position, have opportunities for leadership.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- role-modelling professional values, beliefs and attributes;
- collaborating with clients and the health care team to provide professional practice that respects the rights of clients;
- advocating for clients, the workplace and the profession;
- providing direction to, collaborating with, and sharing knowledge and expertise with novices, students and unregulated care providers;
- acting as a role model and mentor to less-experienced nurses and students;
- participating in nursing associations, committees and interest groups;
- providing leadership through formal and informal roles (e.g., team leader, charge nurse);
- taking action to resolve conflict; and
- developing innovative solutions to practice issues.

In addition, an RN or NP demonstrates the standard by:

- coordinating care for complex clients and demonstrating leadership when collaborating with care providers.

A nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:⁸

- identifying goals that reflect CNO's mission and values and facilitate the advancement of professional practice;

- guiding/coaching nursing projects;
- providing feedback and support to staff about nursing issues at an individual and organizational level;
- creating opportunities for nurses to assume various leadership roles;
- involving nursing staff in decisions that affect their practice; and
- coordinating and supervising the development of client programs and services.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- role-modelling the development of expertise and leadership qualities;
- enabling others to develop expertise and confidence in their abilities; and
- providing professional and educational advice to committees and teams.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- communicating research findings to nurses and other team members;
- promoting nursing research;
- educating staff about the research process;
- promoting nursing through research that improves or validates professional practice; and
- advocating for nursing representation on research review committees.

⁷ Murdoch-Perra, B. (2001). Leadership: The keys to quality outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Care Quality*, 15(2), pp. 68–73.

⁸ Ferguson-Paré, M. (1998). Nursing leadership and autonomous professional practice of registered nurses. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Administration*, 11(2), pp. 7–3

Relationships

Each nurse establishes and maintains respectful, collaborative, therapeutic and professional relationships.

Relationships include therapeutic nurse-client relationships and professional relationships with colleagues, health care team members and employers.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- practising according to CNO's *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006* practice standard;
- demonstrating respect and empathy for, and interest in clients;
- maintaining boundaries between professional therapeutic relationships and non-professional personal relationships;
- ensuring clients' needs remain the focus of nurse-client relationships;
- ensuring that her/his personal needs are met outside of therapeutic nurse-client relationships;
- developing collaborative partnerships with clients and families that respect their needs, wishes, knowledge, experience, values and beliefs;
- recognizing the potential for client abuse;
- preventing abuse when possible; and
- taking action to stop abuse and reporting it appropriately.

Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationships

The client's needs are the focus of the relationship, which is based on trust, respect, intimacy and the appropriate use of power.⁹ Nurses demonstrate empathy and caring in all relationships with clients, families and significant others. It is the responsibility of the nurse to establish and maintain the therapeutic relationship.

In addition, a nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- fostering an environment in which clients and nurses are safe from abuse;
- supporting the therapeutic nurse-client relationship;
- promoting a philosophy of client-centred care and collaborative relationships; and
- advocating for systems of care that acknowledge and support nurses in developing and maintaining therapeutic relationships.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- role-modelling therapeutic nurse-client relationships; and
- identifying and supporting education related to professional and therapeutic relationships.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- communicating knowledge of evidence-based, best-practice guidelines related to caring and therapeutic relationships.

⁹ Refer to CNO's *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006* practice standard.

Professional Relationships

Professional relationships are based on trust and respect, and result in improved client care.

Indicators

A nurse demonstrates the standard by:

- role-modelling positive collegial relationships;
- using a wide range of communication and interpersonal skills to effectively establish and maintain collegial relationships;
- demonstrating knowledge of and respect for each other's roles, knowledge, expertise and unique contribution to the health care team;
- sharing knowledge with others to promote the best possible outcomes for clients;
- developing networks to share knowledge of best practices; and
- demonstrating effective conflict-resolution skills.

In addition, a nurse in an administrator role demonstrates the standard by:

- promoting a work environment in which trust and respect among all health care disciplines is expected;
- ensuring systems are in place to effectively reduce and manage conflict between team members;
- supporting nurses to take action when clients are

at risk of harm from colleagues; and

- valuing and acknowledging nursing expertise and contributions to the health care of clients.

A nurse in an educator role demonstrates the standard by:

- facilitating the development of conflict-resolution skills; and
- supporting nurses in developing skills to address any unethical, unprofessional or unsafe behaviour of colleagues.

A nurse in a researcher role demonstrates the standard by:

- communicating knowledge of the research process and relevant studies to other nurses and team members; and
- supporting nurses in participating in research studies.

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