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Introduction
The Medication practice standard describes nurses’ accountabilities when engaging in medication practices, such as administration, dispensing, medication storage, inventory management and disposal. Three principles outline the expectations related to medication practices that promote public protection. The principles are:
- authority
- competence
- safety.

This practice standard applies to all nurses. In addition, Nurse Practitioners are accountable for the medication practices outlined in the Nurse Practitioner practice standard.

A glossary of bolded terms is provided at the end of this document.

Authority
Nurses must have the necessary authority to perform medication practices.

Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses require an order for a medication practice when:
- a controlled act is involved
- administering a prescription medication1, or
- it is required by legislation that applies to a practice setting2.

Nurses accept orders that are:
- clear
- complete
- appropriate.

Orders for medication can be direct orders (that apply to one client) or directives (that apply to more than one client); however, orders for controlled substances must be direct orders.

When a nurse receives a medication order that is unclear, incomplete or inappropriate, the nurse must not perform the medication practice. Instead, the nurse must follow up with a prescriber in a timely manner.

Competence
Nurses ensure that they have the knowledge, skill and judgment needed to perform medication practices safely.

Nurses:
- ensure their medication practices are evidence-informed
- assess the appropriateness of the medication practice by considering the client, the medication and the environment
- know the limits of their own knowledge, skill and judgment, and get help as needed, and
- do not perform medication practices that they are not competent to perform.

Safety
Nurses promote safe care, and contribute to a culture of safety within their practice environments, when involved in medication practices.

Nurses:
- seek information from the client about their medication, as needed
- provide education to the client regarding their medication
- collaborate with the client in making decisions about the plan of care in relation to medication practices
- promote and/or implement the secure and appropriate storage, transportation and disposal of medication
- promote and/or implement strategies to minimize the risk of misuse and drug diversion
- take appropriate action to resolve or minimize the risk of harm to a client from a medication error or adverse reaction
- report medication errors, near misses or adverse reactions in a timely manner, and
- collaborate in the development, implementation and evaluation of system approaches that support safe medication practices within the health care team.

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1 Medications requiring a prescription can be found in the Health Canada Drug Product Database.
2 For example, for client treatments and diagnostic procedures, the Public Hospitals Act, regulation 965 requires an order from an identified practitioner, such as a Nurse Practitioner or a physician.
Decision Tree: Is the Order Clear, Complete and Appropriate?

Consider:
Do I understand the order?

Is the order clear?

NO

YES

Consider:
Does the order contain all of the information that I need to administer or dispense the medication safely?

Is the order complete?

NO

YES

Consider:
Is the order appropriate considering the client, and the client’s current condition, health history, medication history, and other medications that the client is currently taking?

Is the order appropriate?

NO

YES

The order is clear, complete and appropriate.

Do not perform and follow up with a prescriber.
Decision Tree: Deciding About Medication Administration

1. **Are proper authorizing mechanisms in place?**
   - For example, direct order or directive
   - **YES**
   - **NO**

2. **Do you have the competence to administer?**
   - For example, your knowledge of medication, skills to administer, judgment to identify and respond to outcomes
   - **YES**
   - **NO**

3. **Have you assessed environmental supports?**
   - For example, human and technological resources to monitor and intervene if needed, systems in place to support safe medication administration
   - **YES**
   - **NO**

4. **Have you assessed client factors?**
   - For example, identify client, assess appropriateness, verify consent
   - **YES**
   - **NO**

   - **Administer medication**

   - **Evaluate outcomes**
   - If an adverse reaction occurs, take appropriate action

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**Note:** Document during and/or after administering medication, according to the Documentation practice standard.
Decision Tree: Deciding About Dispensing

Are proper authorizing mechanisms in place?
For example, direct order or directive

NO

Do you have the competence to dispense?
For example, your knowledge of medication, ability to provide appropriate education to the client, skills to dispense

NO

Have you assessed environmental supports?
For example, equipment and workplace policies that support safe dispensing

NO

Have you assessed client factors?
For example, identify client, assess appropriateness, verify consent

NO

Dispense medication

YES

YES

YES

YES

Note: Document during and/or after dispensing medication, according to the Documentation practice standard.
Glossary

**Adverse Drug Reaction:** Adverse drug reaction as defined in the Food and Drug Regulations is a noxious and unintended response to a drug, which occurs at doses normally used or tested for the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of a disease or the modification of an organic function.

**Adverse Reaction:** Adverse reaction as defined in the Natural Health Products Regulations is a noxious and unintended response to a natural health product that occurs at any dose used or tested for the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of a disease or for modifying an organic function.’’

**Controlled Acts:** Acts that could cause harm if performed by those who do not have the knowledge, skill and judgment to perform them. These activities are listed in the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.* (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2014).

**Dispensing:** To select, prepare and transfer stock medication for one or more prescribed medication doses to a client or the client’s representative for administration at a later time.

**Drug Diversion:** When controlled substances are intentionally transferred from legitimate distribution and dispensing channels. (National Opioid Use Guideline Group, 2010).

**Evidence-Informed:** Practice that is based on successful strategies that improve client outcomes and are derived from a combination of various sources of evidence, including client perspective, research, national guidelines, policies, consensus statements, expert opinion and quality improvement data. (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2014).

**Medication Error:** Any preventable event that may cause or lead to inappropriate medication use or patient harm while the medication is in the control of the health care professional, patient, or consumer. Such events may be related to professional practice, health care products, procedures, and systems, including prescribing; order communication; product labeling, packaging, and nomenclature; compounding; dispensing; distribution; administration; education; monitoring; and use. (National Coordinating Council for Medication Error Reporting and Prevention, 2014).

**Near Miss:** An event, situation, or error that took place but was captured before reaching the patient. (ISMP, 2009).
References


