

# **College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia**



## **Guidelines for Resolving Professional Practice Concerns**

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# Introduction

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## Guidelines for Resolving Professional Practice Concerns

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse is responsible for the provision of safe, competent care and treatment to individuals. A variety of circumstances may potentially interfere with the Registered Psychiatric Nurse's ability to provide appropriate care. The Registered Psychiatric Nurse is expected to apply a professional, ethical, and critical thinking approach. The purpose of the document is to provide Registered Psychiatric Nurses with guidelines that will encourage an objective, professional, respectful problem-solving approach to resolving professional practice concerns.

# The Registered Psychiatric Nurse and Professional Practice

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse is accountable for all aspects of her/his professional practice. This accountability is to the individual; to the employer including communicating when this is not possible; to the profession for maintaining acceptable standards of practice; and to the public to assure a safe accountable and ethical level of psychiatric nursing practice.

## Defining Professional Practice Concerns

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that sufficient nursing staff and other resources are available to meet patient care requirements.

Every Registered Psychiatric Nurse is responsible for ensuring that she/he has done all that is possible to provide safe, competent care. It is the Registered Psychiatric Nurse's responsibility to make the employer aware when a lack of resources or a failure to meet standards poses a threat to the delivery of safe care, in a safe environment. A nurse cannot be considered incompetent if she/he has taken all reasonable actions to ensure quality care. By acting on professional practice concerns, the Registered Psychiatric Nurse may protect individuals from harm, and protect the employer and the nurse from litigation.

A professional practice concern is a situation in the workplace that is beyond the ability and attempts of a nurse to resolve individually and that:

- interferes with a nurse's ability to practice according to accepted psychiatric nursing standards
- has or could have an injurious effect on patients

Examples include:

- inadequate leadership
- poor communication
- unrealistic performance expectations
- poor use of the physical layout of the work setting
- staffing which is inadequate in number
- inadequate education or experience
- lack of professional resources, supplies or services
- questionable practices of other health care professionals

- lack of written policies or standards to provide direction and support for nursing practice
- lack of required medical support
- conflict between professionals

Professional practice concerns are frequently noted first as an intuitive feeling that something is wrong in the practice setting.

Professional practice concerns often overlap union and professional jurisdictions. It is important for the Registered Psychiatric Nurse to clarify which route is most appropriate to use for resolution. Both union and professional approaches to resolution can be valid.

## Guidelines to Describe and Communicate Professional Practice Concerns

### 1. Validation

Identify the practice standards that are not being met

- Are there written agency standards/policies/procedures and practice guidelines?
- Are they consistent with provincial standards and regulations?
- Are there written statements from the profession? The College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia Standards, Code of Ethics, Competencies?

Identify the impact on patients and/or family members

- What are the actual or potential effects on patient care?
- Are patients at risk if the situation is not corrected?
- How often and under what circumstances does the situation occur?
- Do others have similar concerns?
- Seek peer consultation and support.

## 2. Communication

Communicate the concern.

- Use channels of communication established by your agency
- Begin by contacting the person to whom you report
- Describe the situation of concern, including the standards not being met and the effect on patients
- Be specific and factual, avoiding assumptions
- Maintain confidentiality
- Make sure all relevant information is provided

### Document the concern

- Use the form specifically provided for this purpose by your employer. If there is no such form, a letter or memo format is suitable. Maintain as much confidentiality as possible.
- Date the document and indicate the name and title of the person to whom you are sending the documentation.
- Make a general opening statement such as - "I wish to report the following professional practice concern..." Then describe the concern, including the following information:
  - (i) Date(s), time(s) and location(s) of events.
  - (ii) Who was involved, including staff and patients?
  - (iii) What happened or what could have happened? Indicate what standards were not being met and how this affected or could have affected patients?
  - (iv) What, if anything, you did about the situation?
  - (v) Indicate that you would like a response to your memo, specifying a date. Set a reasonable time frame, taking into consideration the urgency of your concern and other pertinent factors.

(vi) Sign your name.

(vii) Keep a copy for your records.

### 3. If you do not receive a response

If you do not receive a response by the specified date, ask what progress is being made. If the problem is not being addressed, send a second memo to the same person, forwarding a copy to all levels of administration in the agency. Your second memo should reiterate the problem or include a copy of your original communication, and request assurance that the problem will be addressed right away. Indicate to whom copies are being sent. Keep a copy for yourself.

Should you require further assistance at, either the validation or communication stage, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia's professional staff provides a confidential consulting service. Phone 944-4941, Toll free 1 800 565-2505.

### 4. Resolution

Work toward a resolution at your work site.

- Be prepared to discuss your concerns as part of the resolution process.
- Be open minded. Your main objective is to ensure safe, competent care.
- Be prepared to work cooperatively with your employer to resolve the situation or reach the best possible solution. This may involve some compromise, as long as patient safety is not jeopardized.
- Describe the situation clearly, completely, objectively and in a respectful manner.
- Be prepared to say that your concerns are not being addressed in a satisfactory manner, if this is your belief.
- Be prepared to carry your concerns further and to state your rationale for doing so.

### 5. Request Formal College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia Involvement

- Contact the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia if your concern has not been satisfactorily resolved and you have exhausted all channels of communication in your agency.

- Once notified of a professional practice concern which has not been effectively resolved within an agency, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia can become directly involved. The mission of the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia is to serve and protect the public. The College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia is responsible through self-regulation to assure a safe, accountable and ethical level of psychiatric nursing practice. It is accountable to the public through government regulation.
- Review your documentation and make sure that the facts are accurate and that patient confidentiality has been maintained.
- Write a letter asking the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia for assistance. In it, outline the steps you have taken in your efforts to validate, communicate and resolve the problem within your work setting. Be sure to include the date and copies or a description of all the responses and results achieved.
- Arrange a meeting with your nursing administrator to discuss the letter you have written to the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia and provide a copy.
- Attach a copy of your documentation to your letter and forward this material in an envelope marked "CONFIDENTIAL" to:

Executive Director/Registrar  
 College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of BC  
 251 - 3041 Anson Ave.  
 Coquitlam, BC V3B 2H6

- Keep a copy of all your correspondence for your records.

Once formal involvement is requested, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses will take the initiative to work towards a positive resolution of your professional practice concern. All appropriate routes will be used to achieve this resolution. You will be notified formally of all actions taken by the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia.