
CASE STUDY
CAN SHE USE HER RN TITLE?



Sherry is a registered nurse (RN) who works on an intensive care unit (ICU). She recently jumped at the opportunity to boost her income by working on the side with a new nutritional supplement company. The company employs RNs and other health professionals to promote and sell a new antioxidant that claims to have significant anti-aging properties.

During her orientation, the regional sales manager said that having an RN promote and sell the product gave it credibility and made it more appealing to consumers. He told Sherry that she should be able to make good money in sales because consumers trust nurses and their health advice. Sherry wasn't sure if the product worked but decided to give it a go anyway.

Sherry began selling the antioxidant and found she enjoyed the work. She sold the supplement to health food stores, at trade shows and marketed the product on a company branded personal website. Working on commission, Sherry felt she'd tapped into her entrepreneurial nature. The work flexibility also meshed well with her job in the ICU. On her personal website, in emails and on her business card Sherry included her RN title after her name. This ensured that consumers knew she was an RN when they asked about, or purchased, the product.

IS SHERRY PRACTISING NURSING?

Sherry needs to consider what enables her to use RN as a credential. The title RN relates to her licence to practise nursing and the nature of the work she does. When she uses the RN title, she is representing herself as a registered nurse.

CAN SHERRY USE HER RN TITLE?

The regional sales manager encouraged Sherry to use her title because it added credibility to the product and potentially increased sales. Unfortunately, just because Sherry is registered doesn't mean she can use RN in any context. Sherry needs to consider the context and purpose of including RN. It is not considered ethical to use the RN title if your job mainly involves marketing, endorsing or selling products or health-related services. Using RN on her website, business card and company emails is considered marketing. Other considerations include:

1. How might Sherry's actions be perceived by a member of the public?
 2. Might there be other unanticipated consequences to using her RN title in this way?
 3. Could using her title this way affect public trust?
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WHAT SHOULD SHERRY DO?

1. Not use her professional title. Sherry enjoys selling the product but has noticed people who are skeptical about the antioxidant often buy it once they find out she is a nurse. She mentions this to a colleague, who points her to the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) document Use of Title. Sherry realizes that using RN in this context is not appropriate, as selling products is not the practice of nursing. She also knows that people trust nurses, and by telling people she is a nurse, she may influence their decision to buy. Sherry decides she wants to keep selling the product but will no longer use her RN title or identify herself as a nurse in this role. She lets her manager know she won't be using the title RN anymore.
2. Talk with her sales manager. Sherry needs clarification on what to do and calls the practice consultation service at NANB. She then approaches her regional sales manager with the information she learned. The manager says that having RN after her name is important in gaining the public trust and selling more product. He says that this was a key factor in their decision to hire her. Sherry says that her sales and marketing work is not considered the practice of nursing.

She explains that using RN in her title in this context is unethical. She decides that she can no longer work for the company.

Thank you to the [BC College of Nursing Professionals](#) for permission to adapt their case study "Can She Use Her RN Title?"

RESOURCE

[FAQ- Use of Professional Title](#)