

FAQ

FITNESS TO PRACTISE: What does that mean?

What is **fitness to practise** and what are the expectations for Registered Nurses (RNs) in relation to it?

Fitness to practise is defined as “All the qualities and capabilities of an individual relevant to his or her capacity to practise as a RN, including, but not limited to, freedom from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional condition, or a dependence on alcohol or drugs, that impairs his or her ability to practise nursing”(Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2017, p. 22).

The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (CNA, 2017) also explains the concept of fitness to practise under the value of “Being Accountable” and states that:

Nurses maintain their fitness to practise. If they are aware that they do not have the necessary physical, mental or emotional capacity to practise safely and competently, they must withdraw from the provision of care after consulting with their employer. If they are self-employed arrange for someone else to attend to their client’s health-care needs. Nurses then take the necessary steps to regain their fitness to practise, in consultation with appropriate professional resources (p. 17).

The reality is that at times RNs may feel “unfit” to practise as they are not able to meet the Standards of Practice or values from the *Code of Ethics* due to reasons such as:

- problematic substance use that affects their ability to practise safely and competently;
- an exacerbation of a mental health issues that is affecting their practice;
- physical limitations/injury that interferes with their ability to deliver safe care;
- situations where fatigue or other factors negatively affects their ability to practise safely and competently.

RNs experiencing situations affecting their fitness to practise have a professional and ethical obligation to address the issue in order to continue to practise nursing. In some circumstances, the RN may not be able to deal with the situation alone and may require support. Support is available, you can:

- Speak with your employer;
- Seek advice from your primary health care provider;
- Access staff health programs;
- Speak with a Nurse Consultant at NANB.

Providing safe, competent and ethical care to clients is the responsibility of every RN. When there is an issue related to fitness to practise, the RN must take all possible steps to deal with the situation so that the safety of clients is not at risk. RNs are encouraged to speak with managers or other support services when recognizing issues impacting fitness to practise, whether it applies to themselves or other RNs.

For more information on the RN's responsibilities in relation to fitness to practise, contact NANB to speak with a Nurse Consultant at 1.800.442.4417 or by email at nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*. Ottawa: Author.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2012). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*. Fredericton: Author.