

## Fact Sheet: Abandonment

The practice of registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs), is guided by the [\*Standards of Practice for RNs\*](#) which establishes their expected level of performance. NPs are also held accountable to the [\*Standards for the Practice of Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioners\*](#). RNs and NPs are responsible for practising safely, competently, compassionately, and ethically and are accountable to the client, public, employer and profession. This is demonstrated when they practice in accordance with relevant legislation, standards, Code of Ethics for RNs, regulatory requirements and employer policies (Nurses Association of New Brunswick [NANB], 2019).

The concept of abandonment is directly related to the therapeutic nurse-client relationship, which is formed for the purpose of meeting the client's health care needs. The relationship is planned, time-limited and goal directed, and RNs and NPs enter into the relationship with a commitment to provide quality care. Once care of a client has been undertaken, RNs and NPs have the ethical and legal responsibility to provide care for the assigned period of work (NANB & New Brunswick Nurses Union [NBNU], 2019). Abandonment occurs when an RN or an NP has engaged with a client or has accepted an assignment and then discontinues care without:

- negotiating a mutually acceptable withdrawal of service with the client; or
- arranging for suitable, or replacement services; or
- allowing the employer a reasonable opportunity for alternative or replacement services to be provided (NANB & NBNU, 2019).

An RN or an NP, who discontinues care without meeting the above conditions, could face disciplinary action from their employer as per policy and/or contractual stipulations, and this could also include a complaint being lodged with NANB for professional misconduct.

RNs and NPs are accountable for their actions, decisions and professional conduct and are responsible for appropriately establishing, maintaining and terminating the therapeutic nurse-client relationship. In most circumstances, this relationship ends when the episode of care ends. However, there may be circumstances (e.g. serious threat of harm to the RN or NP, a conflict of interest that compromises the RN's or NP's duty) that require an RN or an NP to terminate the relationship before the episode of care has ended. When handled appropriately this is not considered abandonment, however, this should not be undertaken lightly and should only occur when all other avenues have been considered (NANB, 2015). The Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) suggest that RNs and NPs seek legal advice before ending the nurse-client relationship in unwarranted circumstances (CNPS, 2017).

Situations for RNs and/or NPs that could be considered abandonment include but are not limited to:

- leaving in the middle of a scheduled shift without notifying your supervisor and without transferring care to another appropriate care provider;
- being unavailable to provide care due to other activities (e.g. engaged with social media, gaming, sleeping); or
- refusing to care for a client after accepting responsibility without transferring care to another RN or NP or allowing your manager to find a replacement.

Situations for RNs and/or NPs that would not be considered abandonment include but are not limited to:

- refusing to work extra hours or shifts beyond the posted work schedule when you've given proper notice; or
- withdrawing from care due to fitness to practice concerns (personal health issues, including fatigue) with appropriate notice.

### Helpful Resources for RNs and NPs

[Practicing with Limited Resources: A Guide for RNs and NPs](#) (NANB & NBNU)

[Standards for the Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship](#) (NANB)

[Ask a lawyer: Ending the NP-Client Relationship](#) (CNPS)

[Professional Liability During the Shortage](#) (CNPS)

### References

Canadian Nurses Protective Society. (2017). *Ask a Lawyer: Ending the NP-Client Relationship*.  
<https://www.cnps.ca/index.php?page=494>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2019). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*.  
<http://www.nanb.nb.ca/practice/standards>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2015). *Standards for the Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship*. <http://www.nanb.nb.ca/practice/standards>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick & New Brunswick Nurses Union. (2019). *Practicing with Limited Resources: A Guide for RNs and NPs*.  
<http://www.nanb.nb.ca/resources/results/search&keywords=limited+resources&category=/>