

RN Accountability and Responsibility for Client Care

Q I work in a team setting with other health care professionals and unregulated care providers (UCP) and we share the nursing care we provide our clients. What is the RN's responsibility when working in a team and in particular client assessments?

A It is important for all RNs to understand their professional accountability and responsibility regarding client care.

RNs derive their scope of practice from *The RN Act, 1988 Section 2(k)*, which addresses the practice of registered nursing: "...practice of registered nursing means the performance or co-ordination of health care services including but not limited to: ...observing and assessing the health status of clients, planning, implementing and evaluating nursing care.....". *The Act* is specific—the nursing process of assessment of the client, development of the nursing care plan, care plan implementation and evaluation of the care provided, is part of the "co-ordination" of care and therefore the responsibility of RNs. RNs utilize information gathered as part of client assessment, to assign client care to members of the nursing team and assign tasks to unregulated care providers. The RN responsibility for the nursing process cannot be assigned or delegated away in its

entirety, however parts of the nursing process may be performed by qualified personnel.

Client Assessment. The first step in the nursing process that provides the basis for safe and appropriate client care is the initial assessment of the client. The depth and breadth of foundational knowledge possessed by RNs, in clinical practice, decision-making, critical thinking, leadership, education, policy development, research utilization, and resource management, positions them well as the nursing professional to hold the overall accountability and responsibility for client assessment. The purpose of the initial client assessment is to ascertain the client's acuity, complexity and variability and utilize this information to determine assignment of client care to an appropriate care provider. Though the RN retains overall responsibility for the client assessment, whether initial or ongoing, this does not mean the RN must perform all the

activities involved in assessment of the client. It is within the scope of other health care professionals (e.g. LPNs) to assess clients employing their knowledge base and competencies. Ongoing accurate and timely two way communication is the responsibility of all team members. In addition, the RN must employ proactive communication skills with members of the team to ensure that the necessary information is obtained in order to develop the plan of care, determine the appropriate care provider and ensure the client's care needs are met.

Several principles should be followed by RNs when deciding what aspects of the nursing process may be performed by other members of the team:

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The overarching goal of the nursing process is to achieve positive outcomes for the client.

The RN must know the client population, client needs, the complexity of health problems and other relevant information (e.g. resources), in order to fulfill his/her professional responsibility of coordination of care. It is important to note the complexity, acuity and variability of a client's condition influences the nursing knowledge required to provide the level of care needed by the client. As these factors increase, the depth and breadth of the competencies required to provide nursing care increase as well, and increased RN involvement (e.g. consultation, more direct client care) is required.

The RN must adhere to the current SRNA standards and foundation competencies for the practice of registered nursing, many of which directly reference components of the nursing process.

Some examples include:

- 34. In collaboration with the client, performs an assessment of physical, emotional, spiritual, cognitive, developmental, environmental, social, and learning needs, and the client's beliefs about health and wellness.
- 35. Collects information on client status using, assessment skills such as observation, interview, history taking, interpretation of data, and where applicable, physical

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assessment, including inspection, palpation, auscultation and percussion.

- 36. Analyzes and interprets data obtained in client assessments.
 - 47. Develops learning plans and plans of care with clients and health care team members to promote continuity of care.
 - 62. Employs a critical inquiry process to monitor the effectiveness of client care, in collaboration with the client, individuals, families, groups and communities, and other members of the health care team.
 - 63. Utilizes the results of outcome evaluation to modify and individualize client care in collaboration with clients and other members of the health care team. (SRNA, 2006, p.8-9).
- The complete standards and foundation competencies document is available online at: http://www.srna.org/images/stories/pdfs/nurse_resources/standards_competencies.pdf

The RN must know the scope of practice, level of competence, job description and skill of those they are assigning parts of the nursing process. This is necessary for the RN to ensure those participating in the nursing process have the ability to obtain accurate information upon which to base the care plan and provide safe, quality care. It is the RN's responsibility to decide how best to involve others in contributing to the nursing process. Appropriate staff and skill mix is determined by the RN as she/he utilizes knowledge of the level of competence and skill of other providers to determine the most appropriate care provider who can safely and competently meet the individual needs of clients. Health care professionals such as LPNs and RPNs possess a scope of practice and competencies and are responsible for appropriately performing activities within their scope and competence. UCPs provide services driven by employer job descriptions and possess skills that may be used to contribute to parts of the nursing process as well (e.g. performing vital signs). The RN may assign client care or delegate to UCPs who have the necessary education and training.

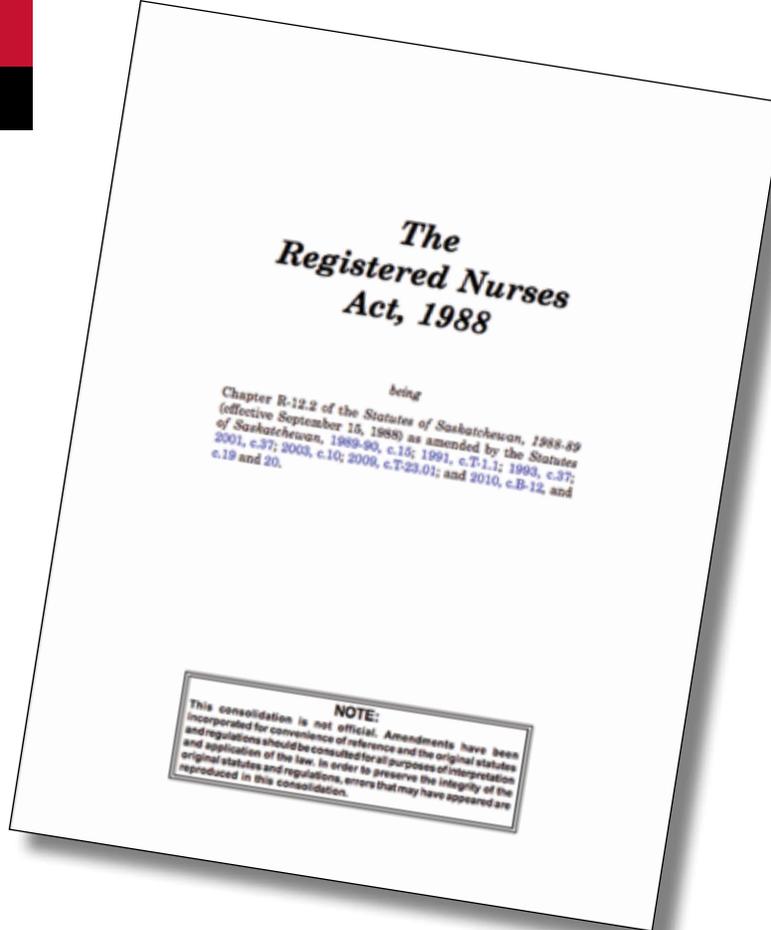
The RN must employ best practices that effectively address collaborative practice/teamwork to facilitate positive client outcomes. Working within an interprofessional team providing nursing services is now the

norm in health care environments. Safe and appropriate care can best be achieved through collaboration, cooperation, consultation, and good communication, while respecting the contributions and responsibilities of each professional. Utilizing best practice guidelines for collaborative practice, such as those available from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) (2006), promote collaborative practice and teamwork.

Key components include:

- Care providers practice within their own level of competence and seek direction and guidance from other health professionals when aspects of care required are beyond their individual competence.
- Team members have a clear understanding of their roles and the roles of others all of which are clearly defined and supported by employer policies.
- Clear processes and structures that promote collaboration should be established, paramount in situations of increasing client complexity.
- Communication is essential to good health care. All team members are responsible to participate in ongoing, accurate and timely two-way communication about the client's condition and care needs. From The Patient First Review Commissioner's Report (2009):

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satisfaction. Communication between providers is a cornerstone of an effective and efficient health care enterprise.” (Government of Saskatchewan, p. 91).

This article provides guidance regarding the role, responsibility and accountability of RNs in the nursing process and principles for facilitating team work and positive client outcomes. However, it is limited in addressing the unique circumstances RNs may encounter. In these situations RNs must depend upon their knowledge, skill and judgment. You are encouraged to contact a SRNA Nursing Advisor for advice specific to your situation.

References

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