

## PROMOTING CONTINUING COMPETENCE FOR REGISTERED NURSES

### POSITION

The Canadian Nurses Association believes the following:

- Continuing competence is the ongoing ability of a nurse to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment and personal attributes required to practise safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.
- Enhancing continuing competence through lifelong learning is essential to professional nursing practice because it contributes to the quality of patient outcomes and to the evidence base for nursing practice.

Individual nurses, professional and regulatory nursing organizations, employers, educational institutions and governments share the responsibility to promote continuing competence. The following list describes some of these responsibilities.

Individual nurses, as members of a self-regulating profession are responsible for:

- demonstrating commitment to continuing competence through lifelong learning, reflective practice and integrating learning into nursing practice;
- ensuring that their competencies<sup>1</sup> are relevant and up to date on a continuing basis in relation to the clients they serve;
- seeking out quality educational experiences relevant to their area of practice;
- supporting each other in demonstrating, developing and maintaining competence;<sup>2</sup>
- working with employers to ensure that their workplaces support continuing competence; and
- meeting the requirements of their regulatory body for continuing competence.

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1 Competencies are specific knowledge, skills and personal attributes required for a registered nurse to practise safely and ethically in a designated role or setting (CNA, 2000).

2 Competence is the ability of a registered nurse to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment and personal attributes required to practise safely and ethically in a designated role or setting (CNA, 2000).

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Professional and regulatory nursing organizations are accountable to the public for:

- promoting safe, ethical and competent care by nurses throughout their careers;
- promoting, developing, maintaining, monitoring and evaluating high-quality continuing competence programs<sup>3</sup> based on a code of ethics and standards of practice; and
- establishing effective continuing competence programs that facilitate mobility of nurses across provincial and territorial borders. These programs must be flexible, be applicable in a variety of settings, provide options for demonstrating continuing competence and be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

Nurse educators are responsible for:

- providing opportunities for nurses entering the profession to develop skills for lifelong learning and continuing competence; and
- working with nurses and nursing organizations and other stakeholders to promote high-quality continuing education opportunities for nurses.

Employers of nurses have the responsibility to:

- put mechanisms in place that promote nurses' identification of knowledge, skills and personal attributes they require for practice; and
- maintain quality practice environments that support and foster continuing competence and continuing competence programs (e.g., preceptorship, mentorship, certification and staff development programs).

Governments have the responsibility to:

- facilitate collaboration among the nursing profession, educational institutions and the ministries of health and education to ensure that high-quality programs are available to support the continuing competence of nurses.

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<sup>3</sup> A continuing competence program is a program that focuses on promoting the maintenance and acquirement of the competence of registered nurses throughout their careers (CNA, 2000).

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## BACKGROUND

Continuing competence contributes to the quality of nursing practice. Continuing competence enables nurses to base their practice on the most recent and strongest evidence necessary to produce high-quality client outcomes, assist in preventing poor practice and protect the public.

To practise safely and competently, nurses comply with professional standards, base their practice on relevant evidence, adhere to the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* and continually acquire new competencies in their area of practice. One way nurses can obtain, maintain and continuously enhance their competence is through continuous learning. Continuous learning requires nurses to reflect on their competencies in relation to the changes occurring in society and the health-care environment and, as a result of that reflection, take action to acquire and develop new competencies.

Continuing nursing education develops and enhances competencies significantly. Continuing nursing education consists of learning experiences organized by a nurse, facility, agency or educational institution and undertaken by a nurse to enhance his/her nursing competencies.

*Approved by the CNA Board of Directors  
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### Replaces:

CNA Position Statement: *Educational Support for Competent Nursing Practice* (1998)

### References:

Canadian Nurses Association. (2000). *A national framework for continuing competence programs for registered nurses*. Ottawa: Author.



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**Also see:**

Related provincial and territorial documents:

Alberta Association of Registered Nurses

*The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta Continuing Competence Program* (2003)

College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba

*Discussion Paper: Continuing Competence for Registered Nurses in Manitoba* (n.d.)

College of Registered Nurse of Nova Scotia

*Continuing Competence Program* (2003)

Nurses Association of New Brunswick

*Position Statement: Continuing Education* (2002)

Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia

*Fact Sheet: Continuing Competence Requirements for Renewal of Practicing Registration* (2003)

Registered Nurses Association of Northwest Territories and Nunavut

*Continuing Competence Process* (2002)

Related International Council of Nurses (ICN) policy statements:

*Career Development in Nursing* (2001)

*Nurse Retention, Transfer and Migration* (1999)

*Health Human Resource Development (HHRD)* (1999)

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