



Position Statement



ETHICAL PRACTICE: THE *CODE OF ETHICS FOR REGISTERED NURSES*

CNA POSITION

The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (CNA, 2008) serves as a foundation for nurses' ethical practice. CNA believes that the following seven values, which are described in the code, are central to ethical nursing practice. In the code each of these values is accompanied by a number of responsibility statements, and together they outline the ethical practice that is expected of registered nurses. CNA believes that the quality of the work environment in which nurses practise is also fundamental to their ability to practise ethically.

- 1. Providing safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care**
Nurses provide safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care.
- 2. Promoting health and well-being**
Nurses work with people to enable them to attain their highest possible level of health and well-being.
- 3. Promoting and respecting informed decision-making**
Nurses recognize, respect and promote a person's right to be informed and make decisions.
- 4. Preserving dignity**
Nurses recognize and respect the intrinsic worth of each person.
- 5. Maintaining privacy and confidentiality**
Nurses recognize the importance of privacy and confidentiality and safeguard personal, family and community information obtained in the context of a professional relationship.
- 6. Promoting justice**
Nurses uphold principles of justice by safeguarding human rights, equity and fairness and by promoting the public good.
- 7. Being accountable**
Nurses are accountable for their actions and answerable for their practice.

Ethical nursing practice also involves endeavouring to address broad aspects of social justice that are associated with health and well-being. These aspects relate to the need for change in systems and societal structures in order to create greater equity for all. Nurses should endeavour as much as possible, individually and collectively, to advocate for and work toward eliminating social inequities. The code contains thirteen statements entitled "ethical endeavours," which are intended to guide nurses in this area. These statements address the need for awareness and action around such areas as social inequities, accessibility and comprehensiveness of health care, and major health concerns (e.g., poverty, violence, inadequate shelter) as well as broader global concerns (e.g., war, violations of human rights, world hunger).

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BACKGROUND

CNA's *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* is a statement of the ethical values of nurses and of nurses' commitments to persons with health-care needs and persons receiving care. It is intended for nurses in all contexts and domains of nursing practice and at all levels of decision-making. It is developed by nurses for nurses. It will assist nurses in practising ethically and working through ethical challenges that arise in their practice with individuals, families, communities and public health systems. CNA revises the code every five years. A rigorous consultative process resulted in the release of a newly revised code in June 2008.

The code provides guidance for ethical relationships, responsibilities, behaviours and decision-making, and it is to be used in conjunction with the professional standards, laws and regulations that guide practice. It serves as a means of self-evaluation and self-reflection for ethical nursing practice and provides a basis for feedback and peer review. The code also serves as an ethical basis from which nurses can advocate for quality work environments that support the delivery of safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care. The code informs other health-care professionals as well as members of the public about the ethical commitments of nurses and the responsibilities nurses accept as being part of a self-regulating profession.

The code is organized in two parts. The specific values and ethical responsibilities expected of registered nurses in Canada are set out in part I. Endeavours that nurses may undertake to address social inequities as part of ethical practice are outlined in part II. A thorough discussion of all the elements of the code can be found in the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2008).

Approved by the CNA Board of Directors

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References:

Canadian Nurses Association. (2008). *Code of ethics for registered nurses*. Ottawa: Author.

Also see:

CNA's website (www.cna-aiic.ca) for related learning resources, ethics position statements and the *Ethics in Practice* series.

Canadian Nurses Association. (2006). *Social justice... a means to an end, an end in itself*. Ottawa: Author.

Related International Council of Nurses publications:

The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses (2006)

Ethical Guidelines for Nursing Research (2003)

Ethics in Nursing Practice: A Guide to Ethical Decision-Making (2002)

Replaces:

Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses [position statement] (2002)

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