



ANBLPN

Association of New Brunswick Licensed
Practical Nurses

AIAANB

L'Association des Infirmier(ère)s Auxiliaires
Autorisé(e)s du Nouveau-Brunswick

Working With Nursing Students

Every Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) has been a student at some point. Yet, many LPNs tend to forget what it is like to be a student. A nursing professional's primary responsibility is to the care and safety of their clients and one method utilized to ensure client safety is through effective collaboration with the health care team. As nursing students are involved in client care, they become part of that health care team and thus part of the collaboration process.

Supporting practical nurse students is an ethical and professional expectation of all LPNs (Petersen, 2020) yet, many are hesitant and unsure of what their accountabilities are when working with students. Additionally, students may also be wary of starting their preceptorships for fear of upsetting their mentor and not feeling supported by the practice environment.

This short fact sheet aims to outline the accountabilities involved when working with nursing students and how to facilitate a supportive, collaborative relationship between nursing students and LPNs.

As an LPN, am I obligated to work with and mentor nursing students?

Regulatory authorities set practice standards for the profession of nursing and these standards state what the minimal expectations are for LPNs across all practice settings. The Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada (2013) state that LPNs:

- *Collaborate with clients, their families...and health care colleagues to promote the health and well-being of individuals, families, and the public; and*
- *Collaborate with colleagues in a cooperative, constructive and respectful manner with the primary goal of providing safe, competent, ethical, and appropriate care to individuals, families, and communities.*



The Standards of Practice for LPNs in Canada (2020) state that LPNs:

- *Provide leadership to support and/or participate in mentoring and preceptorship; and*
- *Demonstrate effective, respectful, and collaborative interpersonal communication to promote and contribute to a positive culture.*

These guiding principles demonstrate that LPNs have an ethical and professional responsibility to mentor and collaborate with nursing students.

What are my accountabilities when working with nursing students?

LPNs must first ensure that they have the knowledge, skill, and judgement to guide and support students safely and competently. While collaborating with the student, they also must keep client safety their priority which means there must be **open and ongoing communication** between the nursing student and the mentor (CNPS, 2021).

Although the student may be assigned to a particular client, it does not mean that the LPN is no longer involved with the client or student because it is “their patient”. The LPN retains a professional accountability to collaborate with the student while providing direction, sharing knowledge, and supporting the student as they develop the skills needed to provide safe, ethical, and compassionate care (CNO, 2021). Creating a supportive and collaborative practice environment helps nursing students become more aware of their individual learning needs and assists them to provide safe, quality client care.

What if the nursing student makes an error? Am I responsible for the error?

LPNs may be reluctant to preceptor a nursing student due to being concerned that they will be held accountable if the student makes an error resulting in client harm. As a self-regulated health care professional, LPNs are accountable for their own actions and inactions – they are not accountable for the actions of any other health care provider (student).

Student nurses are also accountable for their own actions and are accountable to seek support and direction from their mentors to address any errors to minimize client harm. Once the LPN (mentor/preceptor) is made aware of an error, they are accountable to collaborate with the student and provide direction, support, and supervision to address the error and ensure client safety. It remains the responsibility of the student to notify their preceptor if an error occurs as the LPN cannot be held accountable for something they have not been made aware of.

I have accepted a nursing student to preceptor, how can I best support the nursing student to ensure a positive and collaborative learning experience?

Before you begin mentoring/precepting, it is important for you to be aware of the student’s personal scope, knowledge, and skills to ensure you are aware of any limitations or knowledge gaps they may have (CNPS, 2021). Communication between the student and mentor is key in identifying this information ahead of time.

Throughout the preceptorship, there must be open and on-going communication between the student and LPN. Be sure to make yourself available to the student to support their learning and encourage them to come to you with any questions or concerns.



LPNs should also review relevant policies and procedures of the practice environment as well as any educational institution policies that are in place regarding working with students. This is an essential element of risk management, and it is important that both parties are aware of these policies and follow them (CNPS, 2021).

LPNs must also ensure that they are providing appropriate supervision and delegating appropriate activities to the student (CNPS, 2021). Failing to supervise and delegate appropriately could result in negligence on the part of the LPN. Be sure you are aware of how much supervision is required based on the student’s skill set and employer or educational institution policies.

Finally, be sure to provide the student with appropriate and timely feedback (CNO, 2021). Though you should be having open and on-going communication with the student throughout each shift, it is a good idea to convene with the student at the end of the shift. Meeting at the end of the shift will help ensure minimal distractions and gives the student and LPN time to discuss how the shift went, what went well

and what did not go well and identify any areas where the student may require further practice and supervision.

What if I feel I lack the capability to work with and supervise students?

There may be a variety of reasons as to why an LPN may feel they are not capable of working with students. However, it is important to be aware that every LPN has something different to offer to students (Peterson, 2020). Each LPN has a unique set of competencies that they excel in based on their work experience and any post-graduate education they have obtained, and these assets are extremely valuable to nursing students. Just as every LPN's skill set and knowledge base is unique, students also come with their own unique personality and learning style which is why all LPNs have something to offer to students.

LPNs may also feel overwhelmed by the thought of working with a student due to staffing shortages and the extra demands this puts on their workload. It is important to remember that with the appropriate amount of direction and support, the student is there to learn but can also assist with client care. Nursing is a team profession and when we work as a team, we are all more effective and efficient. If there are specific circumstances as to why the LPN feels they are not capable of working with students, they should discuss these concerns directly with their employer.

As a STUDENT, how can I best support my mentor and facilitate a positive learning environment?

Starting your shift by thanking your preceptor for taking the time to mentor you is a great way to acknowledge your preceptor and start the day on a positive note. Students should also remember that nursing is a team profession – offer your assistance where appropriate and show that you are a team player.

Ask questions – the goal of your preceptorship is to gain knowledge and experience as you become a skilled, competent, and safe health care provider. Asking questions shows your desire to learn and serves as a good reminder to the preceptor that their knowledge and expertise is valuable to you (Vincent, 2020).

As a student, you should be aware that the preceptor may at times feel fatigued by the demands of the job due to staffing shortages and overtime. Show compassion to your preceptor and reiterate that you are happy to help them wherever appropriate.



Finally, be sure to end your shift by thanking your preceptor again. Working with students can be challenging due to all of the other demands of their job so it is important to let them know that you value the time they have spent with you.

Conclusion

It is important for LPNs to remember that students are often very nervous when they begin their preceptorship as they adjust to the practice environment, clients, assignments and colleagues. When you collaborate with the student and provide a supportive learning environment, it enhances their learning and confidence as they become skilled professionals. It is a privilege to be able to share your knowledge and experience with students and when they are successful on their registration exam, know that you have played an important role in their success.

References:

- Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses (2020). *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada*. Retrieved from: https://www.anblpn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CCPNR-2020-Standard_ENG.pdf
- Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses (2013). *Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada*. Retrieved from: https://www.anblpn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Code_of_Ethics_2013.pdf
- Canadian Nurses Protective Society (2021). *Managing Legal Risks in Preceptorships*. Retrieved from: <https://cnps.ca/article/managing-legal-risks-in-preceptorships/>
- College of Nurses of Ontario (2021). *Supporting Learners*. Retrieved from: www.cno.org/en/learn-about-standards-guidelines/educational-tools/ask-practice/supporting-learners/
- Petersen, Joanne (2020). *Supporting student nurses: every nurse has something to offer*. Canadian Nurse: Ottawa. Retrieved from: www.canadian-nurse.com/en/articles/issues/2020/may-2020/supporting-student-nurses-every-nurse-has-something-to-offer
- Vincent, Mary (2020). *4 tips to having a positive experience with a nursing preceptor*. Canadian Nurse: Ottawa. Retrieved from: <https://canadian-nurse.com/en/articles/issues/2020/september-2020/4-tips-to-having-a-positive-experience-with-a-nursing-preceptor>