Increasingly, clients are requesting complementary and alternative health care (CAHC). Nurses’ professional obligation to provide safe, competent, appropriate and ethical nursing care extends to nursing activities associated with the provision of CAHC. When nurses take on activities considered to be CAHC practices, their obligations and responsibilities remain the same as when providing more mainstream or traditional nursing care.

Clients place trust in the health care opinions of nurses and may ask nurses to provide information about specific complementary and alternative health care practices. In some cases, nurses may be providing care that is considered complementary or alternative.

**WHAT IS COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE HEALTH CARE?**

Complementary and alternative health care includes modalities or interventions used to address clients’ health needs across the continuum of health care, but are not generally considered part of “mainstream” health care practice in B.C. “Complementary” practices are used alongside mainstream health care while “alternative” practices are used in place of mainstream health care practices.

**CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT, RECOMMENDING, INITIATING OR PARTICIPATING IN COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES WITH CLIENTS**

**Nurses assist clients to understand** the nature of their health problems and to obtain the information and support clients need to make fully informed decisions about CAHC practices. Provide evidence-based information when discussing CAHC practices with clients. When talking with clients, be aware of the potential influence that a nurse’s opinion or recommendations about CAHC practices can have on the client and public.

**Clients have a right to choose** their health care interventions, including interventions considered to be CAHC. The CAHC practices nurses are involved in providing should not pose a greater risk to client health or safety than prevailing health care practices. Nor should they interfere with concomitant health care practices. The decision to initiate or participate in a specific CAHC must be evidence-based.

**Not all CAHC practices are within the scope of nursing practice.** All or part of a CAHC practice may be a restricted activity under the Health Professions Act or other legislative limitations may limit a nurse’s authority to independently initiate or participate in a CAHC practice. Delegation of a specific CAHC practice to a nurse must meet all delegation standards as set out by the relevant regulatory bodies and the Health Professions Act. Nurses do not participate in illegal practices.

**Collaboration, communication and documentation are important.** Nurses communicate, collaborate and consult with other members of the health care team about the clients’ care, including specific CAHC practices. This includes documenting information about client participation in CAHC practices. Nurses document only from first-hand knowledge and for care provided directly to the client, including initiation or participation in CAHC or information provided to clients about CAHC.

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1. Only certain restricted activities can be delegated to a nurse. CRNBC and the regulatory body of the delegating professional must agree that the restricted activity is appropriate for delegation to nurses.
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Information about nurses’ scope of practice and carrying out restricted activities, guidance can be found in:

- **Scope of Practice for Registered Nurses: Standards, Limits and Conditions**
  - Standards for acting within autonomous scope and client-specific orders

Nursing practice is constantly evolving. Decision-making in nursing is complex and often dependent on a number of interrelated factors. CRNBC’s Standards of Practice (Professional Standards, Practice Standards, Scope of Practice Standards) assist you in understanding important issues to consider in discussions about nursing practice.

For more information on this or any other practice issue, visit CRNBC Regulatory practice support Services or email practice@crnbc.ca or phone 604.736.7331 (ext. 332) or 1.800.565.6505.

CRNBC RESOURCES

Available at www.crnbc.ca

Legislation Relevant to Nurses’ Practice (pub. 328)

Professional Standards for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners (pub. 128)

Consent (Practice Standard – pub. 359)

Duty to Provide Care (Practice Standard – pub. 398)

Appropriate Use of Titles by Nurses (Practice Standard – pub. 343)

OTHER RESOURCES


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