College of **Registered Nurses**
of Newfoundland & Labrador

2018

Toolkit for Resolving Professional Practice Issues

CRN NL

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Introduction

Background

As a registered nurse or nurse practitioner (RN/NP), you are accountable and responsible for making decisions that are consistent with safe, competent, compassionate and ethical practice. At the same time, you may face diverse and complex issues that can impact the safe delivery of nursing care. As per the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNNL) (2013) Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses, RNs recognize and take action(s) in situations where client safety is actually or potentially compromised. As self-regulated professionals, RNs/NPs are legally and ethically obligated to recognize and attempt to resolve professional practice issues as they arise in practice to minimize any potential negative impacts they may have on clients. The following resource has been designed to help you identify, communicate and attempt to resolve complex professional practice issues (PPI) you may encounter in your clinical area/ practice environment.

Definition

A professional practice issue is any issue or situation that either:
- compromises client care/service by placing a client at risk; and/or
- affects a nurse's ability to provide care/service consistent with their Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, legislation, other standards and guidelines, or employer policies or procedures.

Toolkit Purpose

This toolkit consists of a six-step framework to assist you when working to resolve a PPI in any context of practice. Tools to help you communicate your concerns related to the professional practice issue with all members of the team including your manager are also part of this toolkit.

In addition to utilizing this toolkit to assist you in resolving a PPI, RNs and NPs should also refer to any agency/employer guidelines, policies, and/or practices specifically related to resolving PPI in that employment setting.

> Please note: if there is an imminent or immediate risk to client safety as a result of any PPI, steps to ensure client safety need to be taken immediately and your manager[1] must be notified.

If you require assistance when working to resolve a professional practice issue, you can contact a Practice Consultant at ARNNL.
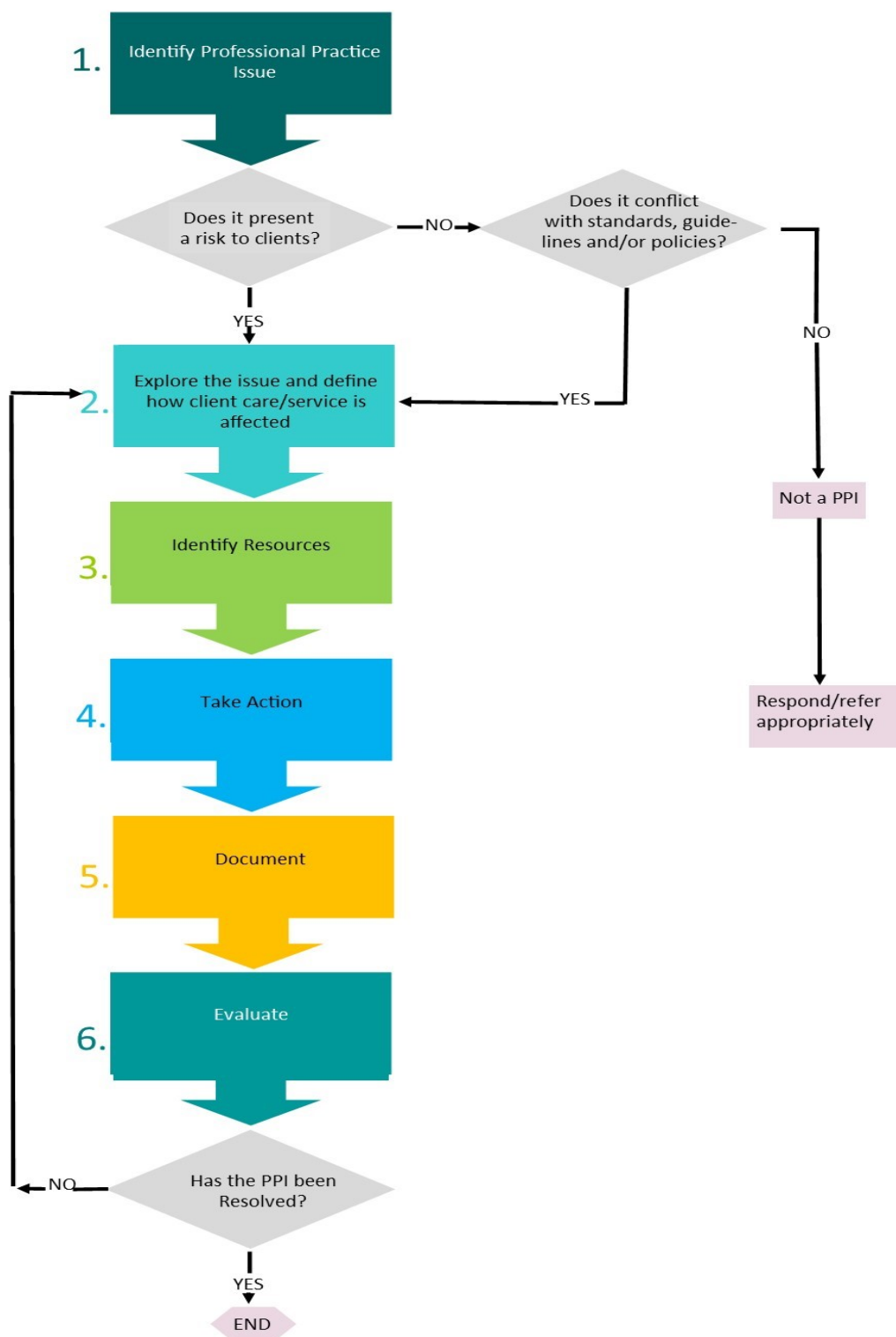
> If the professional practice issue involves conduct deserving of sanction by a registered nurse, the mandatory duty to report provision of the Registered Nurses Act (2008) applies. (See Section 20(1) of the Registered Nurses Act (2008)) and ARNNL's website for details or connect with ARNNL Director of Professional Conduct Review.)

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[1] The term "manager" is used to depict the most appropriate individual within the chain of command (e.g. manager, on-call manager, charge nurse, patient care coordinator, etc.) in your organization to whom you need to report the PPI.

Professional Practice Issues Resolution Framework

The following framework is a guide you can follow by answering the questions included in the framework. Each of the six steps are explained in more detail in this document.

STEP 1
**Identify/Explore the professional practice issue**

The first step in addressing a PPI is being able to identify the issue. As previously stated, a PPI is an issue that compromises client care/service by placing a client at risk or affects a nurse's ability to provide care/service consistent with the Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses, Code of Ethics, legislation, other standards and guidelines, or employer policies or procedures.

In order to determine if your issue is a PPI, you can ask yourself the following questions:
- Does the issue present a risk to clients?
- Does the issue make it difficult to practice according to the ARNNL *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses* (2013) and/or ARNNL *Standards for Nurse Practitioner Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador* (2013), the Canadian Nurses Association's (CNA) *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2017), the *Registered Nurses Act* (2008) or other legislation governing nursing practice?
- Does the issue conflict with the organization's standards, policies and/or guidelines ?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a professional practice issue.

If you answered "no" to all questions, your issue is not likely a professional practice issue but may need to be explored further and resolved.

STEP 2
Explore the Issue and Define How Client Care and/or Service is Affected
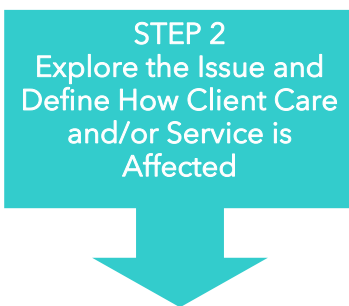
Taking the time to further define a PPI will help you to gain additional insight and a shared understanding among members of the healthcare team. This can also help prevent a hurried response that could be influenced by incomplete information, personal emotions or assumptions.

Reflecting on a PPI is one way to look at the situation more objectively and can help to identify the root cause(s). Gaining your teams' perspective can provide further clarity about the issue and support a team approach. The following questions have been designed to assist you to reflect on and explore a PPI in greater detail.

1. What makes this a PPI? For example, how does this issue:
   - Place clients at risk?
   - Affect your ability to practise according to according to the ARNNL *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses* (2013) and/or ARNNL *Standards for Nurse Practitioner Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador* (2013), the Canadian Nurses Association's (CNA) *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2017), the *Registered Nurses Act* (2008) or other legislation governing nursing practice?
   - Prevent you from following employer/agency policies and procedures?

2. What factors have contributed to the PPI?

3. Do you have the knowledge and skill to address the PPI or will you require the assistance of others to address the PPI?

4. Who is affected by the PPI and what are the other health care team members perspectives?

5. Does your organizational policies, procedures, or guidelines contribute to this issue?

6. Is this a recurring PPI? And if so, why is it recurring?

Once you have explored the PPI fully, develop a description of the issue. Include the date, time, place, people involved and a description of how the issue affects the client, your nursing practice and/or the team. Be sure to outline the contributing factor(s) (see chart below). This description will be helpful when communicating (written/verbal) the issue with your manager and others.

Common Contributing Factors could include:

Competency	Accountability	Physical Resources
Responsibility	Communication	Human Resources
Standards	Policies/Procedures	Legal/Ethical

STEP 3
Identify Resources

Now that you have a good understanding of the PPI, the next step is to identify resources that could be helpful as you work to resolve the issue. These resources can be **internal** or **external** to the organization. RNs/NPs follow the chain of command[2] in the organization when addressing professional practice issues, RNs/NPs will look to utilizing Internal Supports as the first means of addressing a professional practice issue.

These are examples of resources that could provide support or information.

INTERNAL SUPPORTS		
Managers	Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	Quality and Risk Department
Colleagues	Professional Practice	Mentors
Other Health Professionals	Human Resources	Clinical Educators

EXTERNAL SUPPORTS TO ORGANIZATION		
ARNNL Practice Consultants	RNUNL	Education Programs
Canadian Nurses Protective Society	Advocacy Groups (e.g. Canadian Nurses Association (CNA))	Public Commissions/Bodies

RESOURCE DOCUMENTS	
Standards of Practice and other ARNNL documents	RN Act, other legislation
Employer policies and procedures	Code of Ethics

This is not a complete list. The resources you use will depend on the PPI you are addressing, what is available to you and your professional judgment.

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[2] A chain of command defines hierarchical lines of authority in an organization and provides a mechanism for individuals to resolve issues and concerns (HIROC, 2010).

STEP 4
Take Action

A planned approach is helpful, especially if your PPI involves many people or is challenging to resolve. When forming a plan of action, the following steps can be applied. Either individually or with the team:

1. Brainstorm possible solutions to resolve the PPI.

2. Determine the potential positive and negative outcomes for each solution identified.

3. Decide which solution(s) could be the best approach.

4. Develop a plan outlining the actions you will take and when you will implement the chosen solution(s).

The actions you take will depend on the PPI you are facing, the level of support from your team and the resources you have available to you.

Whatever action you choose, it is important to let your manager know so that they are aware and can provide support if required. When discussing a PPI with your manager:

- Provide an objective and detailed description of the PPI with the information identified in Step 2. Include how the PPI has impacted client care, safe nursing practice and/or team relations.

- Frame conversations using the standards of practice and code of ethics. These documents focus the conversation on the nurses' professional responsibilities, keeping the conversation objective.

- Bring possible solutions that could assist in resolving the PPI to discuss.

- Identify what you could do to support the resolution of the PPI.

- Follow up on the meeting with a written correspondence, stressing the importance of the PPI and indicating a reasonable date when you hope to hear back from the manager (Appendix A).

**STEP 5
Document**

It is important to keep your own records of all steps taken to resolve a PPI. This ensures there is an accurate account of events and that you are able to demonstrate you have met your professional obligations. It is recommended that you keep your own notes about all communication with managers and other leaders of your organization and that your follow-up on and any discussions or meetings in writing as soon as possible, requesting a written response by a specific, reasonable date. A template that you can use to develop the correspondence can be found at Appendix A.

The client chart is a clinical health record and is not the place to document explorations or discussions about PPI. Nothing about keeping your own personal records about your attempts to resolve PPIs affects clinical care charting or documenting adverse events and professional practice issues as per your employer's monitoring system (e.g. professional practice reporting forms, occurrence reports). Check your organization's policies regarding documentation and/or refer to the ARNNL's Documentation Standards for more information regarding principles of documentation.

Be sure to include the following in any written communication:

1. The PPI description (step 2).

2. When the issue occurred (specific date and time).

3. Exactly what happened in an objective and factual manner*.

4. How the issue has impacted on your ability to meet Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, legislation or organizational policies.

5. Any other relevant information.

6. A request for the manager to follow up with you.

*(Reminder there should not be identifiable client information in the correspondence).

STEP 6
Evaluate

The final step is to evaluate if the PPI has been resolved and how your actions have impacted on the issue. If the PPI was addressed with the support of others, it is important to include them in the evaluation process. An evaluation helps ensure the issue has been addressed and is a way to examine what you would do the same or change in the event that another PPI were to occur. Depending on the issue, it may not be possible to resolve it immediately and this should be considered in the evaluation process.

If the manager decides that it is best for them to manage the PPI, it is reasonable to ask the manager to inform you when it has been addressed. Be aware that because of confidentiality, the manager may not be able to provide you with detailed information about how they have resolved the PPI. They may only be able to inform you that the issue has been addressed. If you see the PPI reoccur in the future, it is important to let your manager know.

If when you evaluate, you determine the PPI has not been resolved, take a step back and consider why. Review the process you used by asking yourself the following:

- Did you clearly identify the issue?

- Could you define how and when client care or service was affected?

- Were the right people involved in the discussions and attempts to resolve the issue?

- What could have been done differently?

- Once you have done this, choose your next steps. If the PPI persists you may need to continue to take action until it is addressed. Further action could include for example:

- Meet with your manager again to determine when resolution is likely.

- Consider if not already done, discussing the PPI with the next level of management in your agency or other internal resources.

- Continue to notify the appropriate people until the issue has been resolved.

The PPI Toolkit provides a framework to support nurses as they resolve PPIs that occur in their practice. By addressing PPI's, nurses ensure safe, competent, compassionate and ethical practice and the trust that the public holds for the nursing profession.

References and Resources

Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2013). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses.* St. John's: Author.

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Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses.* Ottawa: Author.

College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia. (2017). *Resolving Professional Practice Issues A Toolkit for Nurses.* Halifax, NS: Author.

Registered Nurses Act (2008), c.R-9.1). Retrieved from the House of Assembly Newfoundland and Labrador website: http://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/r09-1.htm.

Appendix A

Sample Correspondence Addressing a Professional Practice Issue

Date

Manager Name Title

Employer Address

Dear X,

I am writing this letter in follow up to our discussion on <date> regarding the professional practice concern we discussed, the impact of the issue on my ability to meet the <Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses/Code of Ethics/legislation/employer policies> and potential solutions. My concern is <state concern>.

The incident occurred on <be specific, objective and factual, include exactly what happened, when it happened, and any other relevant information>. (Reminder there should not be identifiable client information in the correspondence).

The issue has impacted my ability to meet the <Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses/Code of Ethics/legislation/employer policies> in the following ways <include relevant standards and indicators or other details as applicable>.

During our meeting we discussed the situation and the potential impact on our ability to provide safe client care. Possible resolutions we discussed were:

In closing I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me and discuss these concerns. As we discussed, I look forward to a response from you by <date>.

Sincerely,

Name RN
Practice Area