

FOR CERTIFIED PRACTICE REGISTERED NURSES AND CERTIFIED PRACTICE REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES

Opioid use disorder prescribing – consulting and referring

Responsibilities and accountabilities

When prescribing for opioid use disorder (OUD)

A nurse consults with a more experienced or knowledgeable health professional to understand a client's broader plan of care, support their decision-making, and/or as required by their workplace. A nurse may consult with another health professional to help decide whether to continue care or to refer the client to another health professional.

Consulting with other health professionals does not change or reduce a nurse's accountability or responsibility when prescribing for OUD. The nurse still has sole responsibility and accountability for their decisions about the client's care, including when an adverse event occurs related to the nurse's prescribing decisions. Nurses follow workplace policies on managing adverse events. Consulting health professionals are responsible and accountable for the information or expert opinion they provide.

Prescribing is an activity performed within autonomous scope of practice ([RN](#), [RPN](#)). Prescribing requires professional judgment and competence. A nurse cannot use consultation because they lack competence— a nurse either has or does not have the competence to carry out the prescribing activity.

If the nurse continues care after consultation and prescribes medication for the client, they are accountable and responsible for their decision-making and the care they provide, including meeting BCCNM standards of practice. A nurse who consults with another health professional about a prescribing decision and then changes their prescribing decision after the consultation, is still acting within their autonomous scope of practice.

Consultations are documented in the client's health record.

Nurses and nurse practitioners responding to a consultation follow:

- BCCNM standards of practice
- NPs [consultation and referral standards](#)
- Workplace policies regarding providing a consultation

When a nurse refers or transfers care of a client to another health professional, the receiving health professional assumes accountability and responsibility of the client. A transfer of care may be temporary or permanent. Nurses referring clients to other health professionals confirm and communicate with both the other health professional and with the client each health professionals level of involvement in the client's care.

When caring for clients in a team model with a physician or NP

In a team-based setting, it may be appropriate for a certified practice nurse to provide some of the client's care to meet client needs, including prescribing medication. This decision is best made in collaboration with the client.

Nurses are responsible and accountable for their own clinical decision-making and practice whether they are working independently, as part of a collaborative care team, or in a preceptorship experience.

The [RN](#) and [RPN](#) prescribing standards outline the requirements for prescribing medications, including within a team model:

Nurses collaborate, communicate, and/or consult with the client and with other health care professionals when prescribing medications, including:

- Consideration of the broader plan of care for the client developed by the health care team including other prescribers.
- The plan for reassessment/follow-up with respect to the prescribed medication.
- When the prescribing decision would benefit from the expertise of other health care professionals.
- When the needs of the client exceed the nurse's scope of practice or individual competence.
- Documenting the plan of care and communication with the health care team to meet the client's needs.

A client's plan of care states:

- The certified practice nurse's responsibilities and accountabilities for the client's care.
- Other health professional's responsibilities and accountabilities for the client's care.
- That the client knows who is providing their care.

When NPs accept consultations or referrals from CP nurse prescribers for OUD

When receiving a consultation or referral request from other health care professionals, NPs follow workplace policies about providing consultations or referrals and are responsible and accountable for following BCCNM [consultation and referral standards](#):

- a) Confirm the reason for and level of urgency of the request.
- b) Confirm the level of involvement requested.
- c) Ensure that they have access to relevant client health information.

- d) Notify the health care professional if they are unable to provide a consultation or receive a referral.
- e) Confirm their ongoing level of involvement with the client.
- f) Document the request for and outcome of the consultation or referral.

When NPs are preceptors for OUD nurse prescribers

Each health care professional is responsible and accountable for their practice. When acting as a preceptor for a nurse learning to prescribe for OUD, the health care professional:

- Follows workplace guidelines for role, responsibility, and accountability.
- Meets their profession's standards of practice.

Once the preceptorship is successfully completed, the nurse prescriber is solely accountable and responsible for their practice and meet their standards of practice.

Liability when adverse events occur

"Am I liable if..." depends on the context and individual circumstances. Nurses meet their professional and ethical obligations as set out in their standards of practice. This includes taking responsibility and accountability for their own clinical decision-making and practice, including when an adverse event occurs.

All practising nurses in B.C. are required to hold professional liability protection, provided by the [Canadian Nurses Protective Society](#) (CNPS). Nurses employed by any B.C. Health Authority are provided professional liability coverage by their workplace when they are working within the scope of employment with the health care agency.

To answer questions about liability, refer to your workplace risk manager and/or your professional liability insurance provider.

Questions? Complete the [Standards Support intake form](#).

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