

Fact Sheet: Fitness to Practice

Fitness to practice is defined as all the qualities and capabilities of an individual relevant to their capacity to practice as a registered nurse or nurse practitioner (RN/NP)¹, including, but not limited to, freedom from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional condition, and impairment from alcohol or drugs. As outlined in behaviour 6.7 of the [*Code of Conduct for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners*](#) (“the Code of Conduct”), RNs/NPs maintain their fitness to practice by:

- 6.7.1 reflecting on their personal health and seeking help if their health affects their ability to practice safely and competently;
- 6.7.2 removing themselves from practicing nursing, after informing their employer, if they do not have the necessary physical, mental, or emotional capacity to practice safely and competently; in this case, self-employed RNs/NPs must notify the **client** and arrange for someone else to attend to their client’s health care needs; and
- 6.7.3 not practicing when impaired by any substance.

At times, RNs/NPs may feel “unfit” to practice in accordance with the Code of Conduct and/or the [*standards of practice*](#) due to physical or mental health conditions that negatively impacts their ability to practice safely and competently. Some examples of situations where RNs’/NPs’ fitness to practice may be impaired include:

- use of substances such as drugs or alcohol;
- chronic conditions or disorders;
- physical limitations;
- illness or injury; and
- fatigue or other factors that negatively impact their practice.

Fitness to practice can fluctuate over time and RNs/NPs are accountable to self-assess regularly for any factors that may affect their ability to practice safely and competently. When RNs/NPs are experiencing situations affecting their fitness to practice, they have a professional obligation to take appropriate steps to address them so they can continue to uphold the Code

¹ The College of Nursing of New Brunswick (CNNB) is responsible for regulating registered nurses, graduate nurses, nurse practitioners and graduate nurse practitioners in New Brunswick, as such the abbreviation “RNs/NPs” is used in this document and refers to all aforementioned designations. Licensed practical nurses in New Brunswick are regulated by the Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses.

of Conduct and standards of practice which support safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical [nursing practice](#). In some circumstances, the RN/NP may be unable to manage the situation independently and may require additional support. To determine what support is available to meet their individual needs, RNs/NPs should:

- speak with their employer;
- seek advice from their primary health care provider; and
- access staff health programs or other support or treatment programs as required.

When there is an issue related to fitness to practice, the RN/NP must take steps to maintain their fitness to practice. If working in clinical practice, this may include withdrawing from client care to ensure client safety is not compromised. RNs/NPs are expected to address issues that impact fitness to practice, whether it relates to themselves or to another health care provider, including another RN/NP. They also have a professional and legal duty to report certain circumstances including [incompetence](#), [professional misconduct](#), [conduct unbecoming the profession](#) and/or [incapacity](#) of a RN/NP. For more information, please see the [Practice Guideline: Duty to Report](#).

For further information on fitness to practice, please contact a Nurse Consultant at consultation@cnnb-opinb.ca