

FAQ: FITNESS TO PRACTICE: What does that mean?

What is **fitness to practice** and what are the expectations for nurses¹ in relation to it?

Fitness to practice is defined as “All the qualities and capabilities of an individual relevant to his or her capacity to practise as a registered nurse, including, but not limited to, freedom from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional condition, or a dependence on alcohol or drugs, that impairs his or her ability to practise nursing”(Canadian Nurses Association [CNA], 2017, p. 22).

The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (CNA, 2017) explains the concept of fitness to practice under the value of “Being Accountable” and states that:

Nurses maintain their fitness to practice. If they are aware that they do not have the necessary physical, mental or emotional capacity to practice safely and competently, they must withdraw from the provision of care after consulting with their employer. If they are self-employed arrange for someone else to attend to their client’s health-care needs. Nurses then take the necessary steps to regain their fitness to practice, in consultation with appropriate professional resources (p. 17).

The reality is that at times a nurses may feel “unfit” to practise and not able to meet the [standards of practice](#) or values from the *Code of Ethics* due to factors that negatively affect the ability to practice safely and competently such as:

- problematic substance ;
- an exacerbation of a mental health issue;
- physical limitations and/or injury;
- fatigue or other factors that negatively impacts their practice

¹The term “nurse” refers to graduate nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.

Nurses experiencing situations affecting their fitness to practice have a professional and ethical obligation to address the issue in order to continue to practice nursing. In some circumstances, the nurse may not be able to deal with the situation alone and may require support. To determine what support is available to meet their individual needs, nurses should:



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

Providing safe, competent, and ethical care to clients is the responsibility of every nurse. When there is an issue related to fitness to practice, the nurse must take steps to maintain their fitness to practice, which may include withdrawing from client care, so that the safety of clients is not at risk. Nurses are expected to report issues that impact fitness to practice, whether it applies to themselves or another health care provider including another nurse.

For further information on fitness to practice, please contact a Nurse Consultant at practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca.

References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2017). *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*
<https://nanb.nb.ca/en/library/document/code-of-ethics-document-cna/>