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# Code of Ethics for LPNs: Companion Guide



COLLEGE OF LICENSED  
PRACTICAL NURSES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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# CODE OF ETHICS: COMPANION GUIDE

## SAFE, COMPETENT AND ETHICAL CARE

LPNs value the ability to provide safe, competent and ethical care that allows them to fulfill their clinical and professional obligations to the people they serve.

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

LPNs value health promotion and the well-being of clients, colleagues, all members of the healthcare team and themselves. LPNs value assisting persons to achieve their optimum level of health in situations of health, illness, injury, disability and at life's end.

## CHOICE

LPNs respect and promote the autonomy of individuals and help them to express their health needs and values and also to obtain desired information and services so they can make informed decisions.

## DIGNITY & RESPECT

LPNs demonstrate dignity and respect in their professional practice. LPNs recognize and respect the inherent worth of each person and advocate for respectful treatment of all individuals.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

LPNs safeguard information learned in the context of a professional relationship and ensure it is shared outside the healthcare team only with the person's informed consent, or as may be legally required, or where

the failure to disclose would cause significant harm to the individual and others.

## JUSTICE

LPNs uphold principles of equity and fairness to assist persons in receiving a share of health services and resources proportionate to their needs and in promoting social justice.

## INTEGRITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

LPNs are answerable for their practice. LPNs act with integrity, in a manner consistent with their Standards of Practice and their professional accountability.

## QUALITY PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS

LPNs value and advocate for practice environments that have the organizational structures and resources to ensure safety, support and respect for all persons in the work setting.

## INTRODUCTION

The Licensed Practical Nurse, as an essential member of the professional healthcare community is committed to the preservation of life, the prevention of illness, alleviation of suffering and the promotion of health and wellness. By entering into a commitment to the health care profession, the Licensed Practical Nurse is bound by a Code of Ethics to adhere to moral norms of conduct and to assume an ethical and professional commitment primarily to the health and well-being of clients and fami-



lies but also to colleagues, employers and themselves. The College of Licensed Practical Nurses (CLPNBC) Code of Ethics defines the ethical principles and values central to nursing practice, that is, the basic and obvious moral truths that guide deliberation and action, (*Ethics and Issues in Contemporary Nursing*, 2nd Edition Chap 3 & 4). Values are defined as ideals, beliefs, customs, modes of conduct, qualities or goals that are highly prized or preferred by individuals, groups or society. (See also CLPNBC *Standards and Competencies 'Companion Guide'* 2004).

The Code of Ethics for LPNs serves as an ethical basis from which to advocate for quality practice environments with the potential to impact delivery of safe, competent and ethical nursing care. (See also *CLPNBC Practice Guideline: Quality Practice Environment*, May 2004). The Code of Ethics provides the public with statements of expectations of behavior in relation to LPNs' moral and ethical conduct and commitments. It provides guidance for decision-making; serves as a means for self-evaluation and self-reflection regarding ethical nursing practice and provides a basis for feedback and peer review. The Code delineates what nurses must know about their ethical responsibilities, informs healthcare professionals and members of the public about ethical commitments of LPNs and upholds the responsibilities of a self-regulating profession.

The adoption of the Code of Ethics represents a conscious undertaking on the Licensed Practical Nurses of BC to be responsible for upholding the following value statements.

## SAFE, COMPETENT AND ETHICAL CARE

LPNs value the ability to provide safe, competent and ethical care that allows them to fulfill their clinical and professional obligations to the people they serve.

LPNs:

- Are knowledgeable about their Scope of Practice and do not engage in procedures which are beyond the limits of their scope or are in conflict with their Scope of Practice.
- Perform only the nursing functions for which they possess the required knowledge, skills, attitude and judgment.
- Provide competent care and accept responsibility for own range of competencies based on the Scope of Practice and Reserved Actions (See also *Health Professions' Act, Regulations*, and *CLPNBC Standards of Practice*);
- Strive for the highest quality of care achievable within own range of competencies and seek assistance and supervision when aspects of client care required are beyond their range of competencies.
- Adhere to professional standards and personal ethics which reflect favorably upon the Licensed Practical Nurse profession and promote its welfare.
- Base their practice on relevant research findings and acquire new skills and knowledge in their area of practice throughout their career.
- Admit mistakes and take action to prevent or minimize harm arising from an adverse event.
- Voice concerns about participating in



any practice that is considered harmful to the welfare of clients.

- Refrain from abandoning, abusing or neglecting clients and other forms of personal misconduct.
- Comply with expectations of professional behavior as outlined in CLPNBC Practice Guideline: *Code of Ethics*, 2004.
- Report to the appropriate authority and CLPNBC any incompetent or unethical behavior. (See also *Health Professions Act*. Chap.183, Part 3, Articles 32.2, 32.4)
- Inform clients about their care and ensure informed consent prior to providing care.
- Take responsibility for continuing individual professional growth and development.
- Commit to continuing education and regular access to healthcare information that enhances understanding of changes in nursing practice.
- Participate in the CLPNBC Continuing Competency Program.
- Work collaboratively and cooperatively with all members of the health care team.
- Advocate for ongoing research designed to identify best nursing practices for LPNs and for the collection and interpretation of nursing care data.
- Practice with regard to personal health and safety, and safe and supportive work environments.

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

LPNs value health promotion and the well-being of clients, colleagues, all members of the healthcare team and them-

selves. LPNs value assisting persons to achieve their optimum level of health in situations of health, illness, injury, disability and at life's end.

LPNs:

- Recognize that health is more than the absence of disease or infirmity and work in partnership with people to achieve their goals of maximal health and well-being.
- Recognize that organizational, social, economic and political factors affect health and well-being of clients and care providers.
- Recognize the value of a full continuum of accessible health services, including health promotion and disease prevention initiatives, as well as diagnostic, restorative, rehabilitative and palliative care services.
- Recognize, value and respect the knowledge, skills and perspectives of their clients and the other health care providers.
- Respect, promote and strive to ensure the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of the clients in context with their family, social support systems and community.
- Foster comfort and well-being when clients are terminally ill and dying to alleviate suffering and support a dignified and peaceful death.
- Will not initiate or participate in any practice that is considered harmful to the welfare of clients.
- Commit to client advocacy, public education and consumer involvement.
- Support ethically rigorous policies, procedures and research activities; support



professional guidelines in the workplace.

- Promote integrity of the profession by acting as a role model or leader.

## CHOICE

LPNs respect and promote the autonomy of individuals and help them to express their health needs and values; LPNs enable individuals to obtain desired information and services so they can make informed decisions.

LPNs:

- Commit to building a trusting relationship with clients as a foundation for therapeutic communications to ensure clients' choice is understood, expressed and advocated for.
- Demonstrate respect for the right of choice and personal freedoms held by clients and acknowledge that clients are integral partners in the decision-making process.
- Uphold competent persons' legal and moral right to refuse treatment and to choose to live at risk, as long as those decisions are lawful.
- Support clients to contribute to own personal health and safety, to access best current knowledge, to participate in decisions regarding their health and to act on their own behalf in meeting their health care needs.
- Respect the wishes of those who refuse, or are not ready, to receive information about their health condition without being judgmental of client's decisions or actions.
- Respect the informed choice of those with decisional capacity to be independent in choosing lifestyles not conducive to good health, and to direct their own care as they see fit. LPNs are not obligated to comply with clients' wishes when those wishes are contrary to the law.
- Continue to provide opportunities for people to make choices, to change their mind, and to maintain their capacity to make decisions, even when other factors reduce the client's capacity for self-determination.
- Encourage the person to go along with decisions when written consent is not possible.
- Provide appropriate care until alternative care arrangements are in place to meet the clients' desires, if nursing care is requested that is contrary to the LPNs' personal values.
- Respect a person's advance directives about present and future health care choices that have been given or written by a person prior to loss of decisional capacity.
- Consult and collaborate with a substitute decision-maker, family and the health care team, subject to the laws of the jurisdiction, when clients lack the capacity to make decisions. Decisions regarding consent must be made based on what the client would have wanted as far as is known or failing that, as close as is possible in the best interest of the client, in consultation with the family and the care providers.
- Respect a client's choice of decision-making method, recognizing that different cultures place different weight on individualism and often choose to defer to family and community values.
- Advocate for client's choice, within role/function, professional and legal boundaries, if the client's well-being is compromised by family, community or other healthcare providers.



## DIGNITY & RESPECT

LPNs recognize and respect the inherent worth of each person and advocate for respectful treatment of all persons.

LPNs:

- Are guided by the dignity, rights and independence of all persons.
- Demonstrate dignity and respect in their professional practice.
- Accept and express regard for individuals' uniqueness and integrity regardless of color, race, national or ethnic origin, culture, spiritual beliefs, creed, sex, age, marital, family or legal status, lifestyle, sexual orientation, physical and mental disability or social status.
- Demonstrate dignity and respect in all interactions with clients, families and all others in the healthcare environment.
- Provide care that maintains clients' dignity and self-respect.
- Recognize the vulnerability of clients and do not exploit their vulnerabilities for the LPN's own interest or in a way that might compromise the therapeutic relationship.
- Maintain professional boundaries at all times; avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients in their care and do not use their professional relationship for personal or financial gain.
- Respect the physical privacy of persons when care is given by providing care in a discreet manner and by minimizing unwanted intrusions.
- Intervene if others fail to respect the dignity of persons in care.
- Advocate for appropriate use of interventions in order to minimize unnes-

sary and unwanted procedures that may increase suffering.

- Avoid engaging in any form of punishment, unusual treatment or action that is inhuman or degrading towards the persons in their care and avoid complicity in such behaviors.
- Demonstrate respect for clients and conduct themselves as health care professionals, e.g. include the client in conversation with colleagues while providing care; refrain from disrespectful comments regarding clients; use discretion when sharing information of a personal nature with appropriate health care team members regarding clients in public places.
- Demonstrate respect for other health care professionals, employers and client and employers/ property.
- Demonstrate respect for the nursing profession by acting in accordance with their professional standards.
- Accept responsibility for own physical and emotional wellness that enables them to provide dignified nursing care.
- Ensure that all information gained in the context of their practice is handled with dignity and respect, e.g. refrain from discussing clients outside of work.

## CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY

LPNs safeguard information learned in the context of a professional relationship and ensure it is shared outside the healthcare team only with the person's informed consent, or as may be legally required, or where the failure to disclose would cause significant harm.



LPNs:

- Are familiar with and adhere to the principles of the *Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy Act* (FOIPPA), *Health Professions Act*, *CLPNBC By-laws* and other relevant legislation relating to confidentiality.
- Respect and protect clients' right to privacy and confidentiality; protect the confidentiality of all information gained in the context of professional relationship.
- Respect the clients' control over the use, access, disclosure and collection of their personal health information.
- Disclose confidential information only with the client consent and/or when legally obligated. When disclosure is warranted, information provided must be limited to the minimum amount necessary to accomplish the purpose for which it has been disclosed. Further, the number of people informed must be restricted to the minimum necessary.
- Advocate for persons requesting access to their health record subject to legal requirements.
- Practice within relevant laws governing privacy and confidentiality of personal health information.
- Intervene if other healthcare participants fail to maintain their duty of confidentiality.
- Maintain the confidence and trust of their clients and families, colleagues and employers.
- Maintain a current awareness and compliance with all provincial legislation

relating to confidentiality. (See also: *Health Professions Act*, Chap 183, Part 3. Confidential Information, Article 26.2, and Part 5, General. Confidential Information, Articles in 53.)

- Advocate for policies and practices which protect client information.

## JUSTICE

LPNs uphold principles of equity and fairness to assist persons in receiving a share of health services and resources proportionate to their needs and in promoting social justice.

LPNs:

- Avoid discrimination in the provision of nursing care based on a person's colour, race, national or ethnic origin, culture, spiritual beliefs, creed, sex, age, marital, family or legal status, lifestyle, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability or social status.
- Advocate for fairness and inclusiveness in health resource allocation to optimize client care; strive to make fair decisions about allocation of resources under their control based upon individual needs of clients in their care.
- Understand and commit to client advocacy, public education and consumer involvement. E.g., help clients and groups gain access to appropriate and available community resources.
- Participate in the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of policies and protocols designed to provide best care for clients with the best use of appropriate and available resources.



## INTEGRITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

LPNs are answerable for their practice. LPNs act with integrity, in a manner consistent with their professional accountability and Standards of Practice.

LPNs:

- Demonstrate knowledge of and function within the Scope of Practice for LPNs as outlined in the *Health Professions' Act, Regulations and CLPN-BC By-laws* and according to agency policy and protocols.
- Accept professional responsibility and accountability for one's own professional practice to ensure knowledge and skills are maintained and to keep informed about issues affecting the practice of nursing.
- Practice safely and competently within legal and ethical boundaries at all times in accordance with the *CLPNBC Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and Practice Guidelines*; is accountable for outcomes of nursing actions.
- Work co-operatively and collaboratively with honesty and integrity with all members of the health care team.
- Safeguard the quality of nursing care that clients receive without bias or discrimination to ensure that responsible, accountable and ethical care is provided.
- Advocate for and communicate with clients in a nonjudgmental and therapeutic manner without bias and discrimination.
- Share their knowledge and provide mentorship and guidance for the professional development of nursing students and other colleagues/healthcare team members.
- Work only in those areas where they possess the required knowledge, skills and competencies to work.
- Provide timely and accurate feedback to other nurses, colleagues and students about their client care.
- Give reasonable notice to the employer, or if self-employed to their clients, and ensure that appropriate action has been taken to replace them when they are unable to provide care to clients due physical, emotional or mental well-being.
- Give primary consideration to the welfare of clients they serve when deciding to take action with regard to suspected unethical conduct or incompetent or unsafe care; guard against petty and trivial accusations.
- Take appropriate action when actions of any health team member are not in conformity with accepted standards of care; report to the appropriate authority and the CLPNBC any incompetent or unethical behaviors or situations, (*Health Professions Act*, Chap 3, Part 3. Article 32.2. Duty to report registrant and 32.4. Duty to report sexual misconduct).
- Advocate for discussion of ethical issues among health team members, patients and families in the work setting as necessary.
- Advocate for changes to policy, legislation or regulations in concert with their professional associations and colleges, when there is agreement that the directives are unethical.
- As preceptors/mentors, facilitate students to acquire the required knowledge, skills and competencies in order to be responsible and accountable practitioners.
- Assume responsibility for continuing



individual professional growth and development.

- Participate to develop, maintain, monitor and review the Standards of Practice and other relevant documents as legislated under the *Health Professions Act and Regulations*.
- Refrain from permitting names along with professional credentials to be used in connection with the endorsement of commercial products.

## QUALITY PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS

LPNs value and advocate for practice environments that have the organizational structures and resources to ensure safety, support and respect for all persons in the work setting.

LPNs:

- Advocate for sufficient human and material resources to provide safe and competent care.
- Set priorities reflecting the allocation of resources and inform clients, families and employers of resultant changes in routine.
- Advocate for work environments in which all health workers are treated with respect and support when they raise questions or intervene to address unsafe and incompetent practice.
- Protect clients from incompetent, unethical and unsafe care.
- Seek constructive and collaborative approaches to differences among team members that have impact on client care.
- Use reasonable means to protect self and others from anticipated or imminent violence in the workplace.

- If/when in a leadership role, strive to provide adequate staff to meet nursing care requirements.
- As part of a moral community, acknowledge the responsibility to contribute to quality practice settings that are healthy, positive environments.
- Advocate for health care environments conducive to ethical practice and to the health and well-being of clients and others in the setting.
- Share with the professional College, governments, educational facilities and employers, the responsibility for ensuring that programs for the professional development and continued quality of care are available.

## GLOSSARY

### 1. CARING

Caring is a commitment of the enhancement, protection and preservation of the dignity and well-being of others. This requires the use of judgment in the application of relevant knowledge and skills and the confidence necessary to foster trusting relationships as well as conscience and compassion (Roach 1992).

### 2. COLLABORATION

To work in partnership with members of the interdisciplinary health care team while recognizing shared and unique competencies and, at the same time maintaining autonomy within one's own scope of practice (CLPNM, 1999).

### 3. COMPETENCIES

The integrated knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment expected of the LPN practitioner.



#### 4. NURSING

Nursing is a dynamic, caring profession which promotes human dignity. It is the performance or coordination of health care services for the purposes of health promotion and maintenance, disease and injury prevention, health restoration, rehabilitation and palliation. It enables individuals to move toward optimal health and independence or toward a peaceful death when life can no longer be sustained. In the practice of nursing, a combination of knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes are applied to all aspects of client care, through utilization of the nursing process. Nursing actions directed towards meeting clients' health related goals are achieved through partnership with the client and other health team members.

#### 5. SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The scope of practice of a profession outlines the range of roles, functions, responsibilities and activities its practitioners are educated and licensed to perform. It sets the practice boundaries for all the LPN practitioners in BC.

However, the actual scope of practice (range of competencies) of individual practitioners may be significantly narrower than the scope of the profession as a whole (legislated Scope of Practice), being influenced by the individual LPN's education, knowledge, skills and experience, the type of practice setting and the needs of the clients and employers.

#### 6. STANDARD

A standard is a desired and achievable level of performance against which actual performance can be measured. Standards reflect the values and beliefs of a profession and clarify what the profession expects of its members. Standards state levels of

acceptable performance. Individual members of a profession may exceed the expectations of these standards.

#### 7. UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

Unacceptable behavior may be either incompetence or misconduct. Incompetence is an act or omission or a series of acts or omissions that demonstrate lack of reasonable knowledge, skill, judgment and/or lack of concern for the client's welfare to the extent that the client's safety is placed in jeopardy. Misconduct is a failure to meet ethical standards, either through improper actions, illegal acts, or deliberate wrongdoings.

#### 8. VALUES

Values are ideals, customs, modes of conduct, qualities or goals that are highly prized or preferred by individuals, groups or society. (Burkhardt and Nathaniel, 2nd Ed. P.67.)

#### REFERENCES

1. Health Professions Act, Chap. 183 (Nov 17, 2003)
  - Part 3. Confidential Information, Article 26.2
  - Part 3. Duty to report registrant, Article 32.2
  - Part 3. Duty to report sexual misconduct, Article 32.4
  - Part 4.1, Reserved Actions. Articles 50.1 - 50.4
  - Part 5. General. Article 52.1
  - Part 5. General. Confidential Information. Articles in 53.
2. College of Psychiatric Nurses of BC (CRPNBC): *Code of Ethics*



## MANDATE OF CLPNBC

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses in British Columbia (CLPNBC or “The College”) has a mandate to ensure safe, competent and ethical care to British Columbians. Under the provisions of the Health Professions Act, the College must establish requirements for entry into the profession, set and enforce the standards of nursing practice and promote continuous quality improvement and continuing competence of Licensed Practical Nurses in British Columbia.



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