

**Practice Directive**  
**Ending the Nurse Practitioner-  
Client Relationship**

Prince Edward Island College of Nursing  
and Midwifery

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## **This document is for Nurse Practitioners.**

### **Introduction:**

The duty to provide care is a Nurse Practitioner's ethical, legal, and professional obligation to provide clients with safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical nursing services. This duty applies to every aspect of the Nurse Practitioner (NP) - client relationship. An effective NP- client relationship is based on mutual trust and respect. This enables the provision of safe and effective care. Circumstances may arise in which either the client or the NP decides to end the NP-client relationship. NPs must be aware that ending the NP- client relationship can have significant consequences for the client. The NP must attempt to address any issue with the client and determine the difference between a difficult situation and an unsafe situation. As an NP, discharging a client from a practice should be the last resort.

Refusing to provide care or withdrawing from care may be appropriate in very specific circumstances. The impact to the client must be fully considered. Regardless of the validity of doing so, except in extreme circumstances, the NP remains accountable to provide care until it has been transferred and accepted by another appropriate care provider.

### **When may it be appropriate to end the NP – Client Relationship?**

- The client wishes to terminate the professional relationship. If the client is refusing care or requesting that the NP withdraw from their care, the NP has no further accountability to provide care. The NP should provide transfer of care information when a new provider is identified, and a request has been made by the new provider.
- A planned leave from practice (eg: maternity leave, change of job)
- The NP's current standing with PEICNM does not allow them to meet all the client's needs (eg: conditions or restrictions on registration)
- The client and/or client's family exhibits threatening, harassing, or abusive behaviour toward the NP and/or staff. In a situation that poses a genuine risk of harm to the NP, staff, or others, the NP may end the NP- client relationship immediately and is not obligated to engage directly with the client.
- The NP-client relationship has deteriorated, and safe, competent, and ethical care cannot be provided to the client

### **When is it not appropriate to end the NP – Client Relationship?**

- The Prince Edward Island Human Rights Act prohibits a NP from ending the NP- client relationship based on a client's age, colour, creed, disability, ethnic, or national origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, political belief, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or source of income.

- The client's lifestyle choices
- The client respectfully declines to follow your advice
- The client seeks treatment you object to
- The client care needs are complex or time consuming

**Before ending the NP-client relationship, the NP should:**

- Seek legal advice from the Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS)
- Consult with their employer and/or manager. If present, follow any employer policy regarding ending a NP-client relationship
- Discuss the issue(s) and concerns with the client. If possible, work with the client (and others) to implement strategies to address or resolve the issue. If the issue(s) persist or worsen remind the client that these strategies are necessary to maintain a therapeutic NP- Client relationship. It may be best to have another individual, such as another nurse or staff person, present for these discussions. These discussions should be documented.

**If the issue(s) are unable to be resolved:**

- Advise the client in writing of the intent to end the relationship, including the rationale for the decision and the date the relationship will terminate. The relationship may be terminated quickly if a client poses a safety risk to office staff, other clients or the NP. Otherwise, a plan must be made to withdraw services over an agreed upon timeframe.
- Transfer the accountability for ongoing care of the client to another care provider in the same location, if available. If another care provider is not available within the same location:
  - Provide the client with information about how to find another health care provider
  - Provide a reasonable opportunity for the client to arrange alternative services
  - Develop a mutually acceptable plan to withdraw services
- Document any discussions with the client and decisions made. Include the reasons for ending the NP-client relationship, a summary of the actions taken to resolve the issues, the client's response to the actions, and the withdrawal plan.
- The NP is required to provide ongoing care until the care of the client has been transferred to another provider or the agreed upon plan to withdraw services has ended.
- If transferring the client's care to another provider, ensure the client has the name and contact information for that individual. Store and transfer client files per employer policy and in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- If another care provider is not available, provide information about how to access emergency care and non-urgent care.

- Ensure client has access to their record and can access the results of any tests that have been ordered.

### **Conclusion:**

The NP is an ethical practitioner, complying with the Regulated Health Professions Act Registered Nurses Regulations, PEICNM Bylaws, Nurse Practitioner Standard for Practice, NP Entry-Level Competencies and the Code of Ethical Conduct. Ending the NP- client relationship when a client still requires care is generally a measure of last resort and requires particular attention to the necessary formalities to ensure professional misconduct and abandonment is not warranted.

### **References:**

Canadian Nurses Protective Society. (2017). *Ask a lawyer: Ending the NP-client relationship*. Accessed on July 26, 2023 from <https://cnps.ca/article/ending-the-np-client-relationship/>

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