

# Students in Clinical Practice Settings

Rankin School of Nursing  
Academic Regulation



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## PURPOSE

This document outlines the expectations of students in clinical practice settings and the formal responsibilities of all Faculty and Nurse Educators (Clinical Instructors) to support students in meeting practice standards in clinical settings, and to outline the procedures to be followed when students do not meet the expectations.

At StFX, the Rankin School of Nursing (SON) is guided by adult learning principles which support learner success. Additionally, the SON is obligated to follow the CNA Code of Ethics (2017, p. 41) which states “Nursing faculty, preceptors, and nursing students place the safety and wellbeing of the [persons in care] above all other objectives, including education obligations”.

## SCOPE

These procedures apply to all nursing students, all clinical instructors who supervise student learning in nursing clinical practice, the course professor (if applicable), the Assistant Director, and the Director of the SON.

## ACADEMIC REGULATION

Students who are minimally meeting or not meeting standards of practice or code of ethics will be required to undergo further assessment and participate in additional learning as per the procedures detailed below to successfully complete their clinical practice.

## PROCEDURE

## Actions

## Responsibility

Students participating in practica are engaged directly in clinical practice involving standards of practice or code of ethics of the Registered Nurses Association of Canada (CRNNS) and Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), as outlined in the [Registered Nurses Act of the province of Nova Scotia](#). Students must provide safe, quality care to vulnerable populations (such as the very young, the infirmed elderly, and the ill) within the context of a highly complex health system. As such, students are expected to adhere to the [College or Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia's \(CRNNS\) Standards of Practice](#) and to the [Canadian Nursing Association's Code of Ethics](#) as well as Rankin School of Nursing Policies and relevant agency policies (such as, policies particular to their clinical placement environment). The legislation, standards, codes and policies referred to in this paragraph are collectively referred as "standards of professional ethics or practice". Students participating in practica act as ambassadors of the Rankin School of Nursing and of StFX.

Failure to meet expected standards of practice or code of ethics includes instances when a student:

- fails to check patients' armbands despite reminders.
- prepares to administer a medication without evident knowledge of the medication.
- does not recognize or fails to communicate significant changes in patient condition to their faculty clinical instructor and their clinical unit nurse supervisors
- breaches professional boundaries by sharing personal information inappropriately.
- bases care on myth and misinformation rather than best evidence reasonably available.

The above are common examples of a breach of standards of professional ethics or practice. The list is representative and therefore not exhaustive of behaviour that may constitute a breach. It is the student's responsibility to read and understand all standards of practice or code of ethics applicable to his or her practicum context.

In any instance where student conduct in a practicum presents a breach of the standards of professional ethics or practice, the Clinical Instructor must identify the standard in question, in context with the situation, on the day that the event occurred, or when the breach becomes known to the Clinical Instructor (continue with Step 1).

In any instance when student conduct includes:

- physical, verbal, and/or emotional violence to patients, other students, StFX staff or staff of the agency;

- significant patient neglect;
- dangerous or neglectful practice;
- breach of federal narcotics control regulation;
- theft;
- conduct that causes or contributes to a sentinel event;
- use or impairment by alcohol, cannabis or other substance while providing patient care,
- repeated unexcused absences from clinicals; and/or
- lying about conduct during clinical practice or covering up any misconduct

the clinical instructor is to report the incident to the Assistant Director immediately (continue to Steps 3 and 4).

The Clinical Instructor is to report concerns at any step of the intervention process to the Assistant Director.

Breaches are cumulative throughout the program. For example, if a student breaches the standards of practice or code of ethics in year 3 of the program, a breach in year 4 in a different practicum setting is a second infraction. For this reason, a note of each breach shall be recorded on the student's electronic file for future reference.

Students are entitled to bring a support person when attending meetings concerning a possible breach of standards of practice or code of ethics. A support person may be anyone from the University Community that the student chooses to assist them in the process. The support person must respect the confidentiality of all persons involved in the based. If a student wishes to be accompanied by a support person, the student must notify everyone attending the respective meeting so that arrangements can be made.

## 1. Corrective Feedback and Learning Plans for Practice Improvement

When student conduct in clinical practice breaches professional standards of practice or code of ethics, the clinical instructor is to verify the student's electronic file to determine whether this consists of the student's first, continued, or second infraction.

- 1.1 **First Infraction:** When student conduct in a clinical practicum breaches standards of professional ethics or practice, the clinical instructor is to engage in a confidential verbal consultation with the student outlining the correction to be made as well as steps for improvement. This consultation should be based on principles of adult learning and respect and should explore the student's perspective on what occurred with the overall intent of finding a way to improve the student's practice. The Clinical Instructor is to document the **verbal feedback** in his or her own records and place a copy of the documentation in the student's electronic file. If the student is receptive to the feedback and implements it as directed, the corrective process is concluded.
- Student,  
Clinical  
Instructor

- If the student fails to adequately implement the verbal feedback, proceed to step 1.2.
- 1.2 **Second or continued Infraction:** If the student fails to implement the verbal feedback, steps 1.2 to 1.6 apply. If the student breaches the standards of practice or code of ethics again, steps 1.2-1.6 apply, The Clinical Instructor will meet with the student as per 1.1 and must document the circumstances of the meeting. Within three days, using university email, the Clinical Instructor is to provide the student with **written recommendations** citing the CRNNS standards of practice, the Canadian Nursing Association Code of Ethics, and/or other relevant agency or SON policies. Students are responsible for regularly checking their university email.
- 1.3 Before being permitted to continue in the practice setting, the student must submit a Learning Plan. In the Learning Plan, the student must address the identified shortcomings relating to the standard(s) in the written recommendations as well as outline steps to improve future practice. The student and the Clinical Instructor are to meet to discuss the Learning Plan and amend it as necessary. The meeting must take place in person before the student assumes responsibility for patient care. The Clinical Instructor and student are to sign the Learning Plan. If the infraction occurs at a moment in clinical practice when there is insufficient remaining opportunity to create and implement a learning plan, the student and the Clinical Instructor will be required to submit an alternative improvement plan in consultation with the Assistant Director.
- 1.4 The student then must demonstrate adherence to the Learning Plan. A student is successful in demonstrating adherence to the Learning Plan by completing the recommendations identified in the plan and completing the clinical practicum with no further violations of standards of professional ethics or practice. Improvement will be documented in the student evaluation form. If the recommendations in the Learning Plan are not completed or if the student breaches the standards of practice or code of ethics again, continue with Step 2
- 1.5 The Clinical Instructor is to place a copy of the written recommendations for practice improvement, the student's Learning Plan, and relevant follow-up evaluation in the student's electronic file.
- 1.6 The Clinical Instructor will report concerns to the Assistant Director.

Student,  
Clinical  
Instructor

Student,  
Clinical  
Instructor,  
Assistant  
Director-

Student,  
Clinical  
Instructor

Clinical  
Instructor

Clinical  
Instructor,  
Assistant  
Director

## 2. Continuing Concerns within the Same or a Subsequent Nursing Practice Experience

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 2.1 | The Clinical Instructor is to consult with the Assistant Director to confirm whether the student failed to adequately implement the Learning Plan from step 1.3, or has had another breach of the standards of practice or code of ethics after completing their Learning Plan. If so, the student will be placed on clinical practice probation. In instances where the Clinical Instructor and Assistant Director reach conflicting decisions regarding whether or not to place the student on clinical practice probation, the final decision is to be made by the Director of the School of Nursing.  | Clinical Instructor,<br>Assistant Director,<br>Director |
| 2.2 | Once a final decision has been rendered, the Clinical Instructor is to provide the student with formal documentation outlining whether or not the student is placed on clinical practice probation and any additional relevant information within 3 days of reaching the decision. The documentation is to be provided during an in-person meeting with the student, or by university e-mail if the student is unavailable for a meeting. Students are entitled to bring a support person when attending this meeting. If a student wishes to be accompanied by a support person, the student must notify everyone attending the respective meeting so that arrangements can be made. | Clinical Instructor,<br>Assistant Director,<br>Director |
| 2.3 | Following the receipt of the documentation clinical practice probation, the student must submit a written self-remediation plan to the responsible Clinical Instructor within 3 days and before continuing with any practice placements. The student will subsequently meet with the Clinical Instructor to review the plan and amend as necessary. All related documentation, including the students' self-remediation plan, is to be placed in the students' electronic file.   | Student,<br>Clinical Instructor                         |
| 2.4 | A student placed on probation continues to be on probation for two semesters. If the student has another breach of the standards of practice or code of ethics while on clinical practice probation, the student is to undergo the formal assessment outlined in Step 3.  |   |

### 3. Challenges in Meeting Nursing Practice Competencies: Severe misconduct or subsequent incidents

- 3.1 In instances where a student's infraction (whether this is the student's first violation or not) includes:
- physical, verbal, and/or emotional violence to patients, other students, StFX staff or staff of the agency;
  - significant patient neglect;
  - dangerous or neglectful practice;
  - breach of federal narcotics control regulation;
  - theft;
  - conduct that causes or contributes to a sentinel event;
  - use or impairment by alcohol, cannabis or other substance while providing patient care
  - repeated unexcused or unreasonable absences from clinicals; and/or
  - lying about conduct during clinical practice or covering up any misconduct

Assistant  
Director,  
Clinical  
Instructor

or when the student has another breach of the standards of practice or code of ethics while on their first clinical practice probation, the student is to undergo a formal assessment evaluating their competency in nursing practice. This formal assessment is to include a review of the student's file completed by the Clinical Instructor and the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director may consult with relevant others, such as course professor and/or other involved individuals, depending on the situation.

The formal assessment will determine the student's ability to continue in the program. The formal assessment is to conclude whether the student is put on clinical practice probation or is to be dismissed from the program due to clinical failure.

- 3.2 The Assistant Director is to discuss and inform the Director of the review results. In instances where the review has determined that the student is in violation of standards of practice or code of ethics but is not dismissed from the program as the result of the formal assessment, the student is to be put on a clinical practice probation. The Assistant Director and Director are to meet with the student to discuss the review results. Students are entitled to bring a support person when attending this meeting. If a student wishes to be accompanied by a support person, the student must notify everyone attending the respective meeting so that arrangements can be made.

Assistant  
Director,  
Director



If this is the first instance in which the student is put on clinical practice probation, a note is placed in the student's electronic file by the Assistant Director. Additionally, before each of the student's subsequent clinical practice placement, the Assistant Director is to inform the responsible Clinical Instructor for that student's upcoming clinical about the nature of the incident that resulted in clinical practice probation for that student.

- 3.3 A student who has a breach of standards of practice or code of ethics while on clinical practice probation will be dismissed from the program due to clinical practice failure. Assistant Director, Clinical Instructor
- 3.4 Written documentation of the formal assessment is the responsibility of the Assistant Director in consultation with relevant others and must be placed in the student's electronic file. Assistant Director

#### **4. Student Appeal of Clinical Practice Probation or Program Dismissal Due to Clinical Practice Failure**

Students placed on clinical practice probation or who have been dismissed from the program due to clinical practice failure have recourse to an appeal process. For clinical practice probation, proceed to step 4.1. For dismissal due to clinical Practice Failure, proceed directly to step 4.3.

- 4.1 Appeal of Clinical Practice Probation Dean of Science, Assistant Director,  
To appeal a clinical practice probation, the student must write a letter to the Dean of Science. The letter must state the grounds for the appeal. The Dean will request the formal assessment from the Assistant Director before rendering a decision.

While the appeal of a clinical practice probation is under review by the Dean, the Dean will also determine whether the student is permitted to participate in any clinical practice.

- 4.2 Appeal of Dean of Science Decision Associate Dean-Academic, Director  
Students can appeal in writing the decision made by the Dean of Science to Committee on Studies Science. To appeal to Committee on Studies, students must complete the appeal form found in their MesAmis account.

If the Director deems necessary, the Director will appoint a Clinical Instructor to attend the meeting of the Committee on Studies as an independent assessor when the student's appeal is heard. The appointment will be a clinical instructor who is familiar with the field of practice and has not been involved in the case. The appointed person cannot be the course professor associated with the clinical practicum. If a Clinical Instructor attends, the student must be informed

of what the instructor has said and given an opportunity to respond in writing to the Committee on Studies.

The committee will review the appeal letter and all relevant documentation and render a decision. Committee on Studies meetings concerning a student's appeal of the Dean of Science's decision are to be chaired by the Associate Dean-Academic. The Associate Dean- Academic is to notify the Director, the Dean of Science and the student of the committee's decision in writing.

While the Committee on Studies reviews the appeal, the student is not to participate in any clinical practice.

#### 4.3 Appeal of Program Dismissal due to Clinical Practice Failure

Students who have been dismissed from the program must appeal directly to Committee on Studies- Science. To appeal to Committee on Studies, students must complete the appeal form found in their MesAmis account.

If the Director deems necessary, the Director will appoint a Clinical Instructor to attend the meeting of the Committee on Studies as an independent assessor when the student's appeal is heard. The appointment will be a clinical instructor who is familiar with the field of practice and has not been involved in the case. The appointed person cannot be the course professor associated with the clinical practicum. If a Clinical Instructor attends, the student has to be informed of what the instructor has said and given an opportunity to respond in writing to the Committee on studies.

The committee will review the appeal letter and all relevant documentation and render a decision. The Chair of Committee on Studies is to notify the Director and the student of the committee's decision.

While the Committee on Studies reviews the appeal, the student is not to participate in any clinical practice.

#### 4.4 All appeals decisions rendered by the Committee on Studies- Science are final.

## RELATED MATERIALS

Canadian Nurses Association [CNA]. (2017). Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses. Ottawa, ON: CNA.

Canadian Patient Safety Institute [CPSI] & Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI]. (2016).

Measuring patient harm in Canadian hospitals.

[https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/hospital\\_harm\\_summary\\_en.pdf](https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/hospital_harm_summary_en.pdf)

College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia [CRNNS]. (2017). Standards for Nursing Practice for Registered Nurses 2017. Halifax, NS: CRNNS.