

RPNC
*Registered
Psychiatric
Nurses
of Canada*

CODE of ETHICS
&
STANDARDS of PSYCHIATRIC NURSING
PRACTICE

REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES OF CANADA
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The College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta
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THE PROFESSION OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING

Psychiatric Nursing, as a distinct profession, provides service to individuals whose care needs relate to mental, physical, and developmental health. Registered Psychiatric Nurses engage in various roles providing health services to individuals, families, groups, and communities. The practice of psychiatric nursing occurs within the domains of direct practice, education, administration, and research.

The core knowledge and skills of psychiatric nursing are derived from the biological, physiological, and psychological health sciences. The competencies acquired from this body of knowledge guide the application of critical thinking and professional judgment. The core of psychiatric nursing practice is the therapeutic relationship. Psychiatric Nursing focuses on various factors that influence physical and mental health and is committed to the promotion of health, the maintenance of optimal health, the prevention of illness, and the care and treatment of persons with mental illness and developmental disabilities. Registered Psychiatric Nurses work with people on their personal journeys to recovery.

Psychiatric Nursing values all aspects of health. The profession recognizes the complex relationships between emotional, developmental, physical, and mental health; the influence of social factors on physical and mental health and on illness; and the role of culture and spirituality in health promotion, illness prevention, and recovery. Psychiatric Nursing values equality and believes that persons with mental health and developmental challenges deserve access to high quality health services. As a profession, Psychiatric Nursing strives to respond to and influence a complex and changing health system.

This document provides guidance to Registered Psychiatric Nurses, educators, employers, and the public.

PSYCHIATRIC NURSING IN CANADA

Psychiatric Nursing is regulated as a distinct profession in Canada by the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan and the Yukon Territory. Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Canada (RPNC), made up of the provincial/territorial regulatory authorities, provides a unified provincial, national, and international voice for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada. Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Canada's vision is quality mental health services for all Canadians.

The profession of Psychiatric Nursing assumes the responsibility of self-regulation through provincial/territorial legislation. The regulatory authorities in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Territory regulate the profession of Psychiatric Nursing with a mandate to protect the public and set standards for psychiatric nursing practice and education.

This document has been developed in cooperation with the provincial regulatory authorities and has been validated with Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Canada. In March of 2010, the RPNC Board of Directors approved the document.

CODE OF ETHICS & STANDARDS OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING PRACTICE

The *Code of Ethics* is a set of guidelines that articulates an acceptable set of behaviours for Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs). The *Code of Ethics* articulates the ethical principles and values that guide all members of the Psychiatric Nursing profession. It sets out the framework for professional responsibility and accountability while promoting high ethical standards in practice and providing a benchmark for Registered Psychiatric Nurses to use for self-evaluation.

The *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* further articulates the legal and professional obligations of the Registered Psychiatric Nurse. The *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* support one another and apply to all practice settings, domains of practice, and roles regardless of an individual RPN's educational preparation or professional experience.

THE CODE OF ETHICS

Through the *Code of Ethics*, Registered Psychiatric Nurses uphold the values of:

- Safe, competent, and ethical practice to ensure the protection of the public;
- Respect for the inherent worth, right of choice, and dignity of persons;
- Health, mental health, and well-being; and,
- Quality practice.

THE CODE OF ETHICS

Safe, competent, and ethical practice to ensure the protection of the public

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 1) Knows the difference between personal and professional relationships and assumes responsibility for those relationships.
- 2) Commits to building therapeutic relationships and behaves in a manner that protects the integrity of those relationships.
- 3) Ensures that the vulnerabilities of others are not exploited for one's own interests.
- 4) Practices within one's own level of competence and seeks out additional information or guidance when required.
- 5) Strives to ensure evidence-based practice while ensuring continuing competence throughout one's professional career.
- 6) Strives to maintain a level of personal health, mental health, and well-being in order to provide competent, safe, and ethical care.
- 7) Ensures that one neither initiates nor participates in any practice that is considered harmful to the welfare of others.
- 8) Protects the confidentiality of all information gathered in the context of the professional relationship.
- 9) Practices within relevant legislation that governs privacy, access, use, and disclosure of personal information.
- 10) Conducts one's self in a manner that reflects honesty, integrity, reliability, impartiality, and diligence.
- 11) Recognizes the expertise and limitations of co-workers/ colleagues or students when delegating responsibilities.
- 12) Recognizes one's own limitations and uses professional judgment when accepting responsibilities.
- 13) Reports, in good faith, any incompetent or unethical behaviour of health care providers to the appropriate authorities.
- 14) Accepts responsibility and accountability for one's own actions taking all necessary steps to prevent or minimize harm.
- 15) Refrains from permitting one's professional designation to be used for personal gain in connection with the endorsement of products or services.
- 16) Conducts one's self in a manner that promotes a positive image of the profession at the local, community, provincial, and national levels.
- 17) Practices according to provincial and federal statutes/acts/regulations/by-laws and the *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice*.
- 18) Understands, promotes, and upholds the ethical values of the profession.

Respect for the inherent worth, right of choice, and dignity of persons

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 1) Respects people's autonomy and their right to choose by recognizing them as full partners in decision-making.
- 2) Strives to ensure that a person's choices are understood, expressed, and promoted.
- 3) Respects the unique, inherent worth and dignity of all persons and strives to ensure that the rights of individuals are upheld.
- 4) Recognizes and respects diversity and that a person's culture may influence health practices and decision making.
- 5) Upholds the person's legal and moral right to refuse treatment and to choose to live at risk as long as those decisions are in keeping with the law.
- 6) Knows, applies, and upholds the elements of informed consent.
- 7) Ensures psychiatric nursing decisions are consistent with the person's choices or the choices of a substitute decision maker, where applicable.
- 8) Provides opportunities for persons to make choices and decisions even when the capacity for self-determination is reduced.

Health, mental health, and well-being

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 1) Respects the needs and values of each person within the physiological, psychological, developmental, socio-cultural, and spiritual dimensions.
- 2) Understands that physical health and mental health are interconnected and are a dynamic process that fluctuates across the lifespan.
- 3) Recognizes the complex relationships between emotional, developmental, physical, and mental health and the influence of social factors on physical and mental health and on illness.
- 4) Understands that perception, lifestyle, and expectations influence physical and mental health.
- 5) Recognizes the role of culture and spirituality in health promotion, illness prevention, and in recovery.
- 6) Strives to ensure equality in physical and mental health services.

Quality Practice

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 1) Recognizes that community, socio-economic, and political systems influence all aspects of health.
- 2) Ensures that approaches to physical and mental health are collaborative, holistic, and dynamic and include promoting health, preventing illness, and ensuring interventions that promote rehabilitation and recovery.
- 3) Uses and contributes to research that promotes the ongoing development of Psychiatric Nursing knowledge, evidence-based practice, and improvements in mental health care.
- 4) Contributes to quality practice by promoting positive, healthy, and ethical working environments.
- 5) Contributes to promoting and maintaining safe practice environments.
- 6) Ensures that safe and competent practice is a priority by advocating for human and material resources.
- 7) Advocates for fair and equitable access to services and benefits and for equal treatment and protection of all persons.
- 8) Respects and values the knowledge and contributions of other health care providers and works in collaborative partnerships with others.

THE STANDARDS OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING PRACTICE

The *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* describes, in broad terms, the expected level of performance of all Registered Psychiatric Nurses. There are four (4) Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice. A standard may be defined as a benchmark of achievement that is based on a desired level of excellence. The standards provide a guide to the knowledge, skills, values, judgment, and attitudes that are needed to practice safely. They reflect a desired and achievable level of performance against which actual performance can be compared. Their main purpose is to promote, guide, and direct professional psychiatric nursing practice.

Under each standard of practice there are a number of indicators that help determine how to meet the standard of practice. An indicator is a statement that helps illustrate how the standards can be met. The indicators are representative but not comprehensive for each standard.

STANDARD 1: THERAPEUTIC INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Registered Psychiatric Nurses establish professional, interpersonal, and therapeutic relationships with individual, groups, families, and communities.

Indicators:

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- Acts as role model for positive professional, interpersonal, and therapeutic relationships.
- Uses professional judgment and practices with personal integrity to initiate, maintain, and terminate professional, interpersonal, and therapeutic relationships.
- Consistently applies processes of self-awareness within professional practice.
- Collaborates and advocates with individuals, families, groups, and communities.
- Creates therapeutic environments in diverse practice settings.
- Creates partnerships in professional, interpersonal, and therapeutic relationships.
- Recognizes and addresses power imbalances in professional, interpersonal, and therapeutic relationships.

STANDARD 2: APPLICATION AND INTEGRATION OF THEORY-BASED KNOWLEDGE

Registered Psychiatric Nurses apply and integrate theory-based knowledge relevant to professional practice derived from psychiatric nursing education and continued life-long learning.

Indicators:

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- Uses theory-based knowledge in psychiatric nursing practice.
- Synthesizes and applies recognized theories or frameworks to engage in innovative problem solving.
- Provides theoretical and/or evidence-based rationale for psychiatric nursing practice.
- Applies theory to psychiatric nursing decisions and interventions.
- Applies theory-based knowledge, skill, and judgment to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate the practice of psychiatric nursing.
- Applies critical thinking in the problem solving process.
- Applies communication theory to ensure effective verbal and written communication.
- Applies documentation principles to ensure effective written communication.
- Remains current in knowledge relevant to the professional practice setting.
- Engages in life-long learning.

STANDARD 3: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Registered Psychiatric Nurses are accountable to the public for safe, competent, and ethical psychiatric nursing practice.

Indicators:

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- Practices in accordance with the *Code of Ethics, Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice*, and relevant legislation.

- Assumes responsibility and accountability for own practice.
- Recognizes personal and professional limitations and consults and refers appropriately.
- Creates and maintains professional boundaries.
- Integrates cultural safety into psychiatric nursing practice.
- Recognizes and reports unprofessional and/or unethical conduct.
- Assumes responsibility and accountability for continuing competence.

STANDARD 4: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Registered Psychiatric Nurses understand, promote, and uphold the ethical values of the profession.

Indicators:

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- Practices and conducts one's self in a manner that reflects positively on the profession.
- Promotes and adheres to the professional *Code of Ethics*.
- Uses ethical principles to guide psychiatric nursing practice.
- Applies the elements of confidentiality and consent in psychiatric nursing practice.
- Recognizes the power imbalance in the therapeutic relationship and mitigates the risks of exploiting that power.
- Supports the rights of clients to make informed decisions.
- Maintains boundaries between professional and personal relationships.

GLOSSARY

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| Boundaries | Boundaries are limits that protect the space between the professional's power and the client's vulnerability. Boundaries define and separate professional roles from other roles. Boundaries are the limits that allow a safe connection between a professional and a client and are always based on the client's needs (Peterson, M. 1992). |
| Competencies | Competencies are the knowledge, skills, judgments, attitudes, and values required for successful functioning as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse. |
| Continuing Competence | Continuing Competence is the ongoing ability of a Registered Psychiatric Nurse to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment, and interpersonal attributes required to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting. |
| Cultural Safety | Cultural Safety addresses the diverse mental health needs of people living in Canada by communicating and practicing in a way that respects and takes into account the cultural, social, political, linguistic, and spiritual realities of the people with whom one is working (Toward Recovery and Well-Being, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009). |
| Health | Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization). |
| Mental Health | Mental Health can be conceptualized as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and are able to make a contribution to their community (World Health Organization). |

Mental Health Promotion

Mental Health Promotion is the process of developing positive mental health both for and with the community in general and individuals who experience mental illness. It is linked to relationships with others, environmental, and lifestyle factors, and the degree of power one has over one's life (Canadian Mental Health Association).

Recovery

Recovery is a process in which people living with mental health problems and illnesses are empowered and supported to be actively engaged in their own journey of well-being (Toward Recovery and Well-Being, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009).

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