

VERMONT STATE BOARD OF NURSING

FITNESS FOR WORK POSITION STATEMENT

Question:

What is the responsibility of the licensed nurse and the employer regarding the fitness for work of the RN/LPN/LNA/APRN?

Definition:

Fitness for Work:

Fitness for work refers to the physical, mental, and emotional ability of the RN/LPN/LNA/APRN to perform assigned tasks competently and safely.

Background:

An RN/LPN/LNA/APRN's fitness for work may be impaired by fatigue, stress, alcohol, drugs, physical impairment, medical condition, and/or emotional state. The impairment may result in accidents or practice errors or injury to patients, the nurse, or others.

Nurses must be vigilant in order to monitor and respond to complications of illness and to subtle changes in a patient's condition. Nurses must be ready to respond to unpredictable situations, which may arise at any time. Nurses must be able to pay attention to detail. Nurses must be able to carefully analyze information to make accurate assessments and solve patient care related problems. Sleep deprivation, fatigue from long hours of work, and other factors that may affect the nurse's ability to observe, to collect data, to analyze information, to solve problems, and to respond rapidly present a hazard to patient safety and wellbeing.

Position Statement which Reflects the Nurse's Responsibilities:

- Take action to assure own fitness for work, such as getting adequate rest, seeking treatment for medical conditions, seeking counseling for emotional problems, managing stress, and avoiding substances and activities that may impair fitness for work
- Assess own fitness for work before reporting for duty
- Notify the manager, supervisor, or responsible person of any concerns regarding own fitness for work and request work accommodations, as needed
- Refuse an assignment, if not fit to competently and safely perform the assignment
- Notify the individual and the manager, supervisor, or responsible person of any concerns regarding another person's fitness for work.

Position Statement which Reflects the Employer's Responsibilities:

- Develop workplace policies and procedures regarding fitness for work
- Ensure that shifts are not excessively long and that work schedules allow adequate time for rest breaks during and between shifts
- Manage the work environment to promote safety and avoid fatigue and hazards
- Educate employees regarding fitness for work concepts
- Observe and assess the fitness for work of employees on duty. If an RN/LPN/LNA/APRN appears to be unfit for work, remove the employee from the work environment until the situation has been assessed, appropriate action taken, and the employee is determined to be fit to perform their assigned work.
- Educate employees to available resources such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

References/Citations:

American Nurses Association, (2015) Code of Ethics for Nurses, with Interpretive Statements, Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association, Nursebooks.org, publishers,

Joint Commission Sentinel Event Alert on Fatigue and Patient Safety, accessed online 5/24/2018 at https://www.jointcommission.org/sea_issue_48/

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This opinion is subject to change as changes in nursing practice occur.