

National Council of State Boards of Nursing Statement on the Regulatory Implications of Pain Management

Pain management raises important regulatory issues to be addressed by boards of nursing. The treatment of pain is a complex issue, requiring increased awareness and specialized education by nurses. In recent years there have been pharmacological and technical advances that provide new approaches to pain management. Nurses may be concerned about possible side effects of analgesics or fear patients becoming tolerant to analgesics or addicted to the medications. Nurses may fear the scrutiny of regulation, especially related to controlled substances. In addition, when a nurse experiences pain, that nurse's ability to practice safely may be questioned due to the nurse's condition and/or pain treatment. For these reasons there is a need for a national statement identifying the regulatory implications for nursing.

Role of the Board of Nursing

Boards of nursing deal with four unique pain management situations:

1. A nurse fails to meet the expected standards of nursing pain management, resulting in the risk of harm and suffering for patients.
2. An advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) fails to appropriately prescribe medications for pain management.
3. A nurse's personal pain or treatment for pain affects his/her ability to practice safely.
4. A chemically dependent nurse requires pharmacologic pain management.

Boards of nursing can be proactive in their charge to protect the public by:

- Acknowledging the unique regulatory challenges presented by pain management
- Holding a nurse accountable for:
 - Acquiring the education necessary to effectively manage patients experiencing pain.
 - Adhering to accepted nursing pain management standards.
 - Practicing within the appropriate role for the level of licensure.
 - Evaluating one's own ability to safely and competently practice.
- Imposing appropriate action when a nurse fails to comply with the statutory and regulatory requirements and places patients at risk.
- Collaborating with stakeholders (e.g., regulatory entities, educators, professional organizations, employers, and consumers) in implementing regulatory processes that support effective pain management.

NCSBN fully supports the nursing role in the thorough assessment and effective management of pain. Boards' of nursing mandate of public protection includes a responsibility to protect the public from the mismanagement of pain. Boards also must address the impact that being in pain and receiving pain treatment have on the ability of nurses to practice safely.

Future Steps

Additional resources are planned to provide model policies and guidelines for each of the regulatory issues addressed above. This work will support boards of nursing in meeting the regulatory challenges presented by pain management.