

GUIDELINES TO INFORM THE USE OF SENIOR ASSISTANT ROLES WITHIN THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR

Background:

Driven by a variety of challenges in the provision of health care services over the last many years, employers have hired nursing students who have joined the health care team in the position of senior assistant.

Senior assistants are students enrolled in a nursing education program and who are employed by a regional health authority. Employing senior assistants has been a successful recruitment and retention strategy, giving these future professional RNs the opportunity to sample work in a variety of health care settings, using some of the skills acquired through their nursing program, and be better able to make informed choices regarding their area of preferred practice upon graduation. It has also given these students a source of income while pursuing their nursing studies. For the employer, senior assistants provide them with auxiliary staff with a basic preparation and understanding of health care. In addition, hiring of senior assistants has assisted future recruitment of registered nurses as those hired as senior assistants often accept positions where they have worked in the role. These arrangements can be very positive as long as there is clarity regarding the knowledge and skill possessed by senior assistants, and their appropriate utilization in the provision of client care following established assignment and delegation processes. Agency policies including position descriptions are necessary for the provision of safe client care.

Senior assistants are not regulated and not licensed, and therefore fall into the category of an unregulated care provider (UCP). In accordance with provincial legislation, the services or care they provide are limited to the provision of client/patient/resident care services.

With the addition of senior assistants to regional health authorities, some confusion has arisen regarding the role and responsibilities of senior assistants, and the roles and responsibilities of the nursing professionals who currently work within the health care system, in relation to senior assistants. This has prompted calls to the regulatory bodies seeking guidance. To address some of the issues arising from the inclusion of senior assistants in the health care environment and to provide clarity to those nursing professionals working with senior assistants, a working group was established. Key stakeholders including representatives from the SRNA, Sask Health, SAHO, NEPS and the regional health authorities collaborated in the development of these guidelines for the role of senior assistants in Saskatchewan health employers. An evaluation of the usefulness of this guideline will be conducted later this year.

Guidelines Summary:

The Senior Assistant is an unlicensed care provider (UCP).

- All tasks in this role are delegated or assigned by the appropriate nursing professional at the point of care in accordance with regulatory (SRNA, RPNAS, and SALPN) documents and guidelines.
- This casual and temporary position is limited to those who meet the educational requirement outlined in this document. There are no supervisory or charge nurse duties assigned to this position.
- There are no medication administration duties assigned to this position, except where agency policy, that is congruent with **nursing** regulatory documents, exists.

It is not within the role of the senior assistant to routinely administer scheduled and PRN medications. As senior assistants fall into the category of UCP, medication administration duties shall not exceed those of the UCP. It is the responsibility of the regulated professional supervising the senior assistant to ensure adherence to appropriate regulatory body and agency processes and policies enabling senior assistants to perform the task of medication administration (e.g. the SRNA 2004 *Practice of Nursing: RN Assignment and Delegation*; the SALPN December 2006 *Position Paper, Assigning Care to Unregulated Care Providers*). In determining the appropriateness of medication administration by senior assistants, the context of care; setting and client acuity must be taken into

consideration by the appropriate nursing professional. Senior assistants would never be given the task of medication administration for an entire unit.

The role of the Senior Assistant is inter-dependent and collaborative, working under the supervision of the Registered Nurse (RN) and/or Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN) and/or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), and the Manager of Nursing. The extent of the skills that the Senior Assistant performs may vary according to the client's level of wellness and unit needs. The Senior Assistant is expected to use interpersonal relationship skills, and contribute to direct and indirect client care.

The Senior Assistant is employed in a variety of care settings, including primary health care, acute care, and long-term care.

Typical responsibilities include:

The Senior Assistant is accountable for her/his own actions.

The Senior Assistant is responsible to and communicates with, the RN/RPN/LPN in the performance of duties, and others on the health care team as appropriate.

The Senior Assistant is responsible to work within the designated position description, know the limits of his/her competence and to seek assistance as required.

Tasks which could be assigned include:

Client Care

- Assists with personal care according to the care plan
- Provides elimination care (as per agency policy)
- Provides musculo-skeletal care - good body alignment and body mechanics, positioning, active and passive range of motion exercises, safe assistance with transferring and using ambulation devices (may include wheelchairs, crutches, canes, walker, transfer and bath boards, mechanical aids for lifting)
- Application of devices which affect mobility and circulation including bandages, tensors, anti-embolic stockings, binders
- Assists with humidifiers
- Performs simple dressing changes utilizing proper hand washing and sterile technique
- Application of heat and cold (e.g. compresses), according to the care plan
- Responds to emergency situations
 - emergency first aid
 - emergency measures for choking
 - Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
 - measures to lessen shock and control bleeding
 - oral suctioning
- Maintains health care equipment for safety and effectiveness
- Employs comfort measures
- Encourages deep breathing and coughing exercises
- Observes and reports unusual symptoms, changes, accidents, and injuries to RN/ RPN/LPN and documents observations
- Assessment of:
 - vital signs (TPR, BP, oxygen saturation)
 - obvious deviations from the normal by recognizing and noting physical and emotional responses and changes in areas as vital signs, speech, anxiety, skin condition, body position, pain, level of consciousness, mobility, colour, fatigue, and response to therapeutic measures

- risks for falls.
- Performs other duties within the designated position description as directed by the Manager or designate

Client Advocacy

- Protects the rights of the client, including confidentiality, privacy, dignity, and self-determination
- Treats client respectfully at all times
- Provides supportive, assuring, compassionate care
- Participates with the team, client and significant others, in developing the care plan
- Affirms the client's consent before initial care
- In collaboration with the RN/RPN/LPN, incident reporting as per agency policy.

Client Education

- Assists in client and family teaching
- Explains purpose, nature, and anticipated outcomes of care provided
- Assists in determining learning needs of clients
- Reinforces the teaching of others
- Reports unmet patient/family education need to RN/RPN/LPN

Communication

- Demonstrates warmth, interest, empathy, trust, and honesty in interactions with clients
- Provides clients and significant others with emotional support and the opportunity to express feelings
- Verbally and non-verbally communicates care and concern to the client and family
- Keeps RN/RPN/LPN informed of pertinent observations in a timely manner
- Participates in the development of nursing care plans to meet the client's physical and psychological needs
- Properly uses the care plan, under the direction of the RN/RPN/LPN
- Accurately documents all necessary data on client's chart
- Participates in client care conferences as required; provides oral and written reports as required.

Senior Assistants would generally have the following knowledge, skills and abilities:

1. Current certification in Basic Life Support for Health Care Providers.
2. Good written and oral communication skills.
3. Effective interpersonal skills and the ability to work both independently and as a member of a team.
4. Ability to recognize and maintain confidential information.
5. Successful completion of Year 3 of the 4-year Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan (NEPS) or successful completion of all courses up to and including NEPS 356.3 of Term D2 within the Second Degree Entry Option (SDEO) of NEPS or courses from out of province nursing programs assessed to be equivalent.

It is the responsibility of professionals to know their role, responsibilities and accountabilities in working with and supervising senior assistants. We suggest consulting the resources listed in this guideline and contacting their respective professional regulatory for guidance as needed.

Resources Available:

Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses. (2006). *Position Paper. Assigning Care to Unregulated Care Providers*. Regina, SK: Author.

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. (2006). Ask a practice advisor. *Student employees providing nursing care*. SRNA Newsbulletin 8(2). Regina, SK: Author.

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. (2004). *Practice of Nursing: RN assignment & delegation*. Regina, SK: Author.

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. (2004). *The RN scope of practice*. Regina, SK: Author.

Sample position description available from Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region or Saskatoon Health Region.