

SASKATCHEWAN



ASSOCIATION

# **Documentation:**

## Guidelines for Registered Nurses

Effective December 1, 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA) wishes to thank the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNNL) for granting permission to adopt and adapt their publication *Documentation: Standards for Registered Nurses, 2010*. The SRNA also wishes to thank Bev Balaski, RN who conducted research leading to the development of this guideline, and all RN members/stakeholders who informed the final documentation guideline for RNs.

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. (2011). *Documentation: Guidelines for Registered Nurses*. Regina, Sk: Author.

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## INTRODUCTION

Documentation is a vital component of safe, ethical and effective nursing practice, regardless of the context of practice or whether the documentation is paper-based or electronic. It reflects the application of nursing knowledge, skills and judgment, as well as the clients' perspective. Documentation establishes accountability, promotes quality nursing care, facilitates communication among registered nurses (RNs) and other healthcare providers, and conveys the contribution of nursing to health care. **Documentation is not separate from care and it is not optional. It is an integral part of nursing practice.**

The RN that adequately and accurately documents the nursing process in a clear, concise and accurate manner portrays themselves as professional, ethical, competent and safe, leading to a determination of credibility by other health care team members.

It has been argued that the quality of care a client receives is reflected in the quality of the documentation of the care, and that a direct relationship between the two exists. There is also substantial evidence to indicate that when documentation concerning client care is poor (incomplete, inaccurate or even inappropriate) and the care team is unsure as to the care required (or provided), potential negative consequences for clients may occur from:

- inability to provide continuity and consistency of care;
- the omission or duplication of treatment;
- inappropriate care decisions;
- inability to evaluate the effectiveness of care/treatment; and
- responding ineffectively to deterioration in a client's health status (Marsh, 2007, p. 4).

Quality Documentation is described below in answer to *Why, Who, How, What, and When* questions.

Nursing documentation refers to written or electronically-generated client information obtained through the nursing process or service delivery. The registered nursing domain of practice and agency policies and procedures will determine who the client is and the most appropriate method of documentation. Through documentation, RNs communicate observations, decisions, actions and outcomes. The information in this guideline specifically relates to the legal medical record as defined by agency policy. Non-legal medical record documentation is outside the scope of this guideline (i.e. ward-specific communications).

This document provides guidance and direction to assist RNs in making informed decisions related to documentation. **RNs are expected to adhere to all relevant legislation, standards and competencies, and agency policies and procedures related to privacy, documentation and information management (e.g., verbal, written or electronic).**

Although different documentation formats and technology may be used throughout the province, quality nursing documentation is an expected RN practice in every area of care, service delivery and setting. This includes RNs who are self employed and/or working in an independent practice. A sample of different formats for documentation is included as Appendix B.

For the purposes of this document RNs refers to: registered nurses, graduate nurses, registered nurse (nurse practitioners) and registered nurse (graduate nurse practitioners). RNs are recommended to review the current SRNA *Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses*, and the *Registered Nurse (Nurse Practitioner) RN(NP) Standard & Core Competencies* as appropriate. **The information contained in this guideline is current as of the publication date. RNs and other readers are encouraged to also consult best practices, agency policies and procedures, legislation and/or regulations pertinent to documentation to inform specific instances, issues or concerns.**

## **1** Why Should RNs Document?

### 1.1 Method of Communication to Support Continuity of Care

Documentation provides accurate, pertinent, current, and comprehensive information concerning the condition and care of the client or services. Information that is shared in the health record, “shares astute nursing insights, reflects the excellence of holistic nursing and provides a record of the professional and personal support that RNs provide everyday to clients and their families” (College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta [CARNA], 2007, p. 12). Communicating a client’s health information to other members of the health care team, as appropriate, enables all health care providers to make prudent professional judgments and promotes consistency and continuity in client care.

### 1.2 Promote Quality Improvement and Manage Risk

Clear, complete and accurate nursing documentation facilitates quality improvement initiatives and risk management analysis for the client, staff and the organization (College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia [CRNNS], 2005). Information from the health record is used as a quality improvement mechanism to evaluate services or care provided and to help plan improvements (e.g., chart audits, performance reviews, and accreditation). Through information documented in client records, agencies are more readily able to evaluate progress towards outcomes, trend challenges, identify and manage risks and ultimately, maximize client safety. RNs can anticipate that at some point in time clinical documentation completed in relation to client care provision will be scrutinized by others (World Health Organization [WHO], 2007).

### 1.3 Mechanism for Professional Accountability

Accountability means being answerable for one’s own actions. The health record demonstrates RNs’ accountability and gives credit to RNs for the care they give or the service they provide. In Saskatchewan, all RNs are required to document evidence of safe, competent and ethical care in accordance with the current *Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses; Registered Nurse (Nurse Practitioner) RN(NP) Standards & Core Competencies; Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*; and applicable agency policy. Documentation must reflect the RN’s professional judgment, assessment, coordination of care, decisions, actions, and evaluation. Additionally, documentation must honour the ethical concepts of good practice such as promoting respect, confidentiality, and informed decision making.

## 1.4 Protection Against Liability

The client's record is a legal document and, as such, can be used as documentary evidence in a court of law. Documentation should provide a chronological record of the events involving client care and services and may be used to refresh one's memory, if required to give evidence in court. Courts will use clinical documents to reconstruct events, establish times and dates, and to substantiate and/or resolve conflict in testimony.

Documentation provides specific information (who, what, how and why) about the planning for, provision of, and client's response to care or services. It provides evidence that safe and competent care was delivered, that the care/service met acceptable standards of care, was reasonable and prudent, was provided in a timely manner and, was consistent with agency policies and procedures. Altering or failure to keep records as required could result in legal and professional ramifications. The perception of alteration and/or falsification reduces the credibility of documentation, and can undermine the ability for defence in an inquiry, investigation, or proceeding (Brous, 2009). One example would be using whiteout or correction tape on the medical record and writing over top. Quality documentation is a RN's best defence in legal proceedings (Canadian Nurses Protective Society [CNPS], 2007b).

## 1.5 Method of Expanding the Science of Nursing

The health record can be a valuable source of data for nursing and health research. Nursing documentation can be used to identify the impact of nursing interventions and evaluate client outcomes, as well as to identify any gaps or concerns. Accurately recorded information is essential to obtain quality research data. Research derived from quality documentation can generate information on evidence-based practice which in turn can improve the profession (Nurses Association of New Brunswick [NANB], 2002).

## 1.6 Funding and Resource Management

Documentation can be used by administrators to support funding and resource management decisions. Health records can identify the type and amount of client care required, services provided, and the efficiency and effectiveness of those services. It also can be used by third party insurers for the approval of client insurance claims. Workload measurement and/or client classification systems, derived as a consequence of nursing documentation, can be used to help determine the allocation of staff, skill mix, and/or funding (CRNNS, 2005).

## 2 Who Should Document?

Documentation can be completed by different care providers depending on the circumstances and purpose of the documentation. This section provides additional detail regarding firsthand knowledge, third party documentation and cosigning and countersigning entries.

### 2.1 Firsthand Knowledge

**Legal and professional principles dictate that the provider with personal or firsthand knowledge (you did it or you saw it) should document the information.** Firsthand knowledge in this context means that the professional who is doing the recording is the one who provided the care. For example, completion of an incident report by the RN who witnessed a client fall.

In situations when two or more people provide care or services, the RN who has the primary assignment is expected to document the assessment, intervention and client response, noting as necessary the role of other care providers. However, the second nurse is expected to review the documentation, making an additional entry if necessary and, in accordance with agency policy cosign the record (see Section 2.3). In some cases it may be more appropriate for both people to document his/her role in the care, for example to reflect different assessments or roles, or to meet agency policies that require more than one care provider (e.g., two nurse assist for high risk delivery).

If the client is receiving services from two different agencies or departments that have separate records, for example health and justice, or community health and a private agency such as a personal care home, it is important that the RN record the care that he/she provided in all the relevant document(s). Expectations for documentation must be clearly articulated in agency policy to promote consistency. For example, the RN may be required to record the administration of a medication in both the client's personal care home record and the client's agency record. If this is not possible then discussion should occur between the involved agencies to determine how both parties can share information to ensure continuity of care while balancing confidentiality and client safety.

### 2.2 Third Party Documentation

**Third party documentation, documenting for others, is not generally supported as it may lead to errors and/or inaccuracies which could be detrimental to the provision of quality client care.** It could also have an impact on the admissibility of records in court proceedings or diminish the actual credit given to a record as evidence. "It is therefore very important that the RN who has first-hand knowledge of the events or who performed the action documents the activities" (CARNA, 2007, p. 13). There may be times when it is not possible to do first hand recording so the information must be recorded by a 'third party'. If information is recorded as reported from another source, the RN must use quotation marks and identify the source. It may also be necessary to record why third party documentation occurred. Agency policy should clearly delineate when a third party may document for others. The following are some circumstances where documenting for others may be considered.

### Designated Recorder.

It is commonly accepted practice to assign a designated recorder for emergency situations where there may be limited time to have all involved parties record the specific care they implemented. It is best practice to include in the chart a list of all who were present for validation, as necessary. Designated recorders may also be considered in select circumstances where it is not practical for client safety reasons for the care provider to contemporaneously record the event as it occurs. For example, there may be a recorder identified for routine procedural events in specialty areas such as the endoscopy unit, the operating room or the delivery room. Cosigning documentation may be appropriate in this situation, and should be in accordance with agency policy (see Section 2.3).

### Auxiliary or External Personnel.

RNs must be aware of agency policy for documentation by health providers who provide direct care, such as unregulated care providers or personnel employed from external organizations. If an agency's policy specifies that auxiliary/external personnel are *not* to record information, RNs should document reports given to them by the auxiliary or external personnel, including the reporter's name and title.

### Client or Family.

In some settings it may be an accepted practice that a client and/or family member document observations and components of care. Some examples include, newborn intake and output, palliative client's travelling diary, self administration of medications, recording of wound drainage or trending vital signs. Agency policy and procedure should outline the responsibilities of RNs if they are required to transcribe, summarize or file the information into the agency record.

### Students.

Students are learners and not employees. All students are expected to document the care they provide in accordance with agency and academic policies. Cosigning notes written by students is not encouraged (see Section 2.3). However, it may be necessary for the co-assigned RN or preceptor to record their own assessments, interventions and evaluations. The need for this extra level of documentation must be based within agency policy and upon professional judgment. For example, if a client developed an acute or complex problem the coassigned RN should document.

## 2.3 Cosigning and Countersigning Entries

Cosigning refers to a second or confirming signature on a witnessed event or activity. Agency policy on cosigning must clearly indicate both the intent of a co-signature and in what circumstances cosigning is required. RNs are accountable for their own actions and do not routinely need someone to cosign their practice.

There are some examples where cosigning is prudent practice, such as, recording a critical incident witnessed by a second care provider, verbal consent or telephone orders, verification of a medication dosage, discarding of a narcotic, or client identification for a blood transfusion. Cosigning implies shared accountability. **It is imperative that the person cosigning actually witnessed or participated in the event.**

Countersigning is defined as a second or confirming signature on a previously signed document, a blind signature – which is not witnessed. This is generally not a supported or needed practice in nursing care but may be effectively utilized as a quality control process, and should be completed in accordance with agency policy and procedure. For example, a RN reviews a chart to determine if all the orders are accurately transcribed or all required interventions are completed. Countersigning does not imply that the second person provided the service; it does imply that the person approved or verified that the service or record was completed.

Cosigning or countersigning for reasons such as entries written by RNs in orientation, student nurses or LPNs is not acceptable and may add a level of accountability which the RN would not otherwise incur.

## **3** How Should RNs Document?

### 3.1 Legibility and Spelling

All entries in a paper-based system should be written legibly using black or blue ink, or in accordance with agency policy. The use of black ink is considered best for optical scanning technology. It is advisable not to change pens while writing an entry of an event as this may give the impression that the entry was not completed in its entirety at one time. Never use pencil, gel or felt pens, or coloured highlighters, as they are not permanent, can be erased or changed, and do not copy or scan clearly.

Correct spelling demonstrates competence and attention to detail. Misspelled words and/or illegible entries can result in misinterpretation of information and could lead to a client adverse event (e.g., the letter “o” has been confused with “u”, medication errors have occurred involving drugs with similar spellings). Legibility and interpretation of documentation can become critical should it be used in circumstances such as an investigation or legal proceeding, and the nurse is unable to relate the information documented.

### 3.2 Blank (White) Space

There should be no blank or ‘white’ space in documents as this space presents an opportunity for others to add information unbeknownst to the original author. To avoid this risk, ensure that documentation is charted in a consecutive manner and draw a single line completely through the blank space, ending with your signature/designation (Potter and Perry, 2010). When transcribing an order it is suggested to block out or trace a partial square to identify that a part of the record has been noted. Fill in all blocks or spaces on flow sheets with the approved symbol/comment, (e.g., check mark, initials, not applicable, or x mark). The use of ditto (“”) marks to indicate repetition of information is unsafe and inappropriate. As well, ditto marks leave excess white space. Review of agency policy can provide additional direction to RNs on the appropriate method to use for paper-based records.

### 3.3 Abbreviations, Symbols, and Acronyms

The use of abbreviations, symbols or acronyms can improve efficiencies in documentation if their meaning is well understood by everyone. **Abbreviations and symbols that are obscure, obsolete, poorly defined or have multiple meanings can lead to errors, cause confusion, and waste time.** These abbreviations, symbols and acronyms should be used cautiously and written out in full as needed for clarity. Some common terms that are incorrectly abbreviated include: C/O - complaints of, pt - patient, CP - chest pain and, d/c - discharge. The Institute of Safe Medication Practices has identified a list of *error-prone abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations* for medication management that have been reported as frequently misinterpreted and involved in harmful medication errors (Institute of Safe Medication Practices [ISMP], 2010). Agencies should articulate the accepted abbreviations, symbols and acronyms for use in their organization.

### 3.4 Mistaken Entry/Errors

Inaccuracies in documentation can result in inappropriate care decisions. **Errors must be corrected according to agency policy in an open and honest manner.** The content in question must remain clearly visible and retrievable so that the purpose and content of the correction is clearly understood. White out or other correction type devices are not to be used. If two systems of recording are utilized, such as, an electronic chart and a paper chart, then both records must be corrected. If the electronic and paper records are retained in separate places, the agency should identify processes to ensure relevant communication regarding the correction occurs between the two systems.

One method to correct an error in a paper-based system would be to, cross through the word(s) with a single line, and insert your initials, along with the date and time the correction was made. Then enter the correct information. For computer-based documentation permission/access to make corrections to the record may be required. Check your agency policy for the accepted process for correcting errors. For example, some require the words 'Charting or Documentation Error' or 'Mistaken Entry' to be included with your initials, while others may require that the correction be noted with the use of a symbol such as an asterisk.

Do not make entries between lines, remove items (e.g., monitor strips, lab reports, requisitions, and checklists), erase or use correction products, hide or obliterate an error. Entries must not be recopied because of a documentation error. If for any reason paper-based documentation becomes illegible (e.g., water spills), maintain the illegible paper and follow agency policy on how to address the situation.

**The WHO (2007) emphasizes, "Failure to keep and maintain certain documentation records as required, falsifying documentation, incomplete or inaccurate documentation, signing or issuing a document that the person knows or suspects to be false or misleading, may be found to constitute unprofessional conduct by a regulatory authority" (p. 4). *The Registered Nurses Act (1988)* identifies falsification of a record as professional misconduct [Section 26(2)(i)].**

### 3.5 Electronic systems

The province is moving towards a fully integrated electronic health record. Once implemented the electronic health record (EHR) promises to increase system efficiencies. “An EHR integrates information from many resources into a single, lifetime record of an individual’s key health history and care” (CNA, 2006, p. 2). **The Canadian Nurses Association (2006) states that the EHR should be designed with the involvement of RNs and that they should be supported in the transition from paper-based to electronic systems.**

While there may be some variation in the way electronic data is recorded due to software applications, the underlying principles remain the same for electronic and paper based systems. When a practice setting has two systems for documentation (paper and electronic) continuity of care must be maintained. Agency policy should identify which system to use and how to cross reference if both sources are being used or in the event of an electronic system failure. For example, the RN may need to indicate in his/her note if there is pertinent information on the same topic in another source. When the care of a client involves two different agencies such as, a personal care home and community health services from a regional health authority, it might be necessary to document client-specific information in the records of both agencies. Agency policy should identify the parameters for this practice.

## 4

### What Should RNs Document?

#### 4.1 Clear, Concise, Unbiased and Accurate

**Precision in documentation is imperative.** Objectivity means expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Objective data means information that is observed (e.g., crying, swelling, bleeding) or measured (e.g., temperature, blood pressure, weight, measurements), and includes interventions, actions or procedures as well as the client’s response. If there is uncertainty about a specific observation or assessment, document the reason for the uncertainty. RNs are further recommended to review all documentation, paper-based or electronic, to ensure it is clear, concise, unbiased and accurate.

**Avoid generalizations-** Documentation is strengthened by the inclusion of details and accurate descriptions. Vague phrases or expressions such as *status unchanged, assessment done, had a good day, small amount, up and about,* are conclusions without supported facts. Be specific and use complete, precise descriptions of care (e.g., ‘slept quietly from 0100-0600 and stated that he felt well rested’). The use of words such as *appears, seems, or apparently* are not generally acceptable because they demonstrate uncertainty and suggest that a RN did not know the facts. An exception might be when the supposed fact cannot be verified. For example, *appears to be sleeping,* may be appropriate as the only means of verification would be to disturb the client and ask if he/she was actually asleep.

***Avoid slang or euphemisms*** - The use of this type of language can be misinterpreted and can reflect negatively on the RN (e.g., ‘frequent flyer’ for a client with frequent visits to the Emergency Room).

***Avoid bias***- Do not document value judgments or unfounded conclusions; document only conclusions that can be supported with data. For example, unless you witnessed a client falling, you should state, “found client on floor”. It is not acceptable for RNs to make value judgments or culturally insensitive comments. These comments might suggest or imply a dislike for a client which could be construed to mean that the care provided was substandard. Select neutral terminology or describe observed behaviours. For example, rather than saying that the “client was drunk” state, “noted an odour of alcohol and speech was slurred”. Instead of “client is aggressive” state, “client has been shouting, and using obscene language”. **Write each entry with the knowledge that the client has a right to read their own chart.** Only document what can be verified. If you assess that a drainage tube is dislodged when you receive a client from another area state “noted upon arrival...” versus ... “tube dislodged ... in the other unit”.

***Identify subjective comments***- Subjective data may include statements or feedback from a client as well as from family members or others. When charting subjective information provide accurate examples of what was said using quotes appropriately along with identification of the individual who made a particular statement. For example, client states, “I am pain-free today,” or “I understood the information provided”. It is not, however, appropriate to include other client’s names on a medical record due to privacy laws. If a statement from another client is necessary, use the client’s initials rather than full name.

***Read what you submit***- Be careful with the use of default and recall features in the electronic record. When using these features for efficiency or to promote consistency, be sure to read what is presented to validate that the information is accurate for this submission.

## 4.2 Date, Time, Signature and Designation

Notations in a health record generally begin with the date and time of an entry and conclude with the recorder’s signature and designation. Policies for documenting date, time and signature will vary from agency to agency. For example, a full signature may include either the first initial or first name along with the surname and professional designation such as, RN, GN, RN(NP), or RN(GNP). Personal initials can only be used if a master list to match the caregiver’s initials with a signature and designation is maintained within the health record. Depending upon the format approved in the agency the full signature may be located on every page/form or a list of all relevant staff signatures are saved in a designated section of each client’s chart. The record is a chronology of events and must be accurate, it is therefore critical to use the appropriate form of time as outlined by the agency (a.m./p.m. vs military time) and that a consistent timepiece or device (e.g., watch, clock, monitor, computer) is used to record entries to accurately reflect sequencing of events.

In the electronic chart identification is controlled through the use of passwords and other access limitations. Therefore it is imperative to ensure security of user passwords and to use safeguards such as logging off when finished using a system (see Appendix C).

### 4.3 All Aspects of the Nursing Process

Documentation which reflects the nursing process demonstrates that the RN has fulfilled his/her duty of care. It supports accountability by linking assessment through to evaluation. If the client interaction occurred through telehealth, it is important to identify the modality utilized (e.g., video or telephone). As a general rule, any information that is clinically significant should be documented. To determine what is essential to document, for each episode of care or service the health record should contain:

- a clear, concise statement of client status (including: physical; psychological; spiritual);
- relevant assessment data (include client/family comments as appropriate);
- all ongoing monitoring and communications;
- the care/service provided (all interventions, including advocacy, counselling, consultation, and teaching);
- an evaluation of outcomes, including the client's response and plans for follow up; and
- a discharge planning.

Failure to document evaluation is a common deficiency in charting. It is important to demonstrate the effectiveness of care/services. The RN should document answers to the following questions as appropriate: What were the client outcomes? What additional nursing actions were implemented as a consequence of client outcomes? For example, did the vital signs stabilize? Did the pain subside? Did the client understand the information? Was the referral made? What follow-up was implemented?

**A good test to evaluate whether your documentation is satisfactory is to answer the following question: “If another RN had to step in and take over this assignment, does the record provide sufficient information for the seamless delivery of safe, competent and ethical care” (CARNA, 2006).**

### 4.4 Admission, Transfer, Transport, and Discharge Information

Health records must include data related to admission, transfer, transportation and discharge. This information provides baseline data for subsequent care and follow-up. Agency policy should identify expectations on the recording of communication between practitioners or services. The client's chart should reflect what information was provided to prepare the client for any transitions. The RN should include information on the client's status at the time, instructions provided (verbal and written), arrangements for follow-up, evidence of the client's understanding and, as appropriate, family involvement.

## 4.5 Communications Among Health Care Providers

Record all significant client-related communications with other health care providers. Note the date and time of contact, the information you provided and the response received from the other health care provider. Communication includes all types of contact among care providers including written, electronic and verbal formats and all unsuccessful attempts to contact another health care provider. If communication is unsuccessful, the nurse should also record information about alternate channels pursued in his/her effort to ensure client care needs or services were met.

**Faxing is a method for communicating information between health care providers in different locations. Although this is a commonly-accepted practice in most settings, RNs need to ensure that information is transmitted to the correct source and verify that the facsimile was completed as intended.** RNs should review agency policy and procedures for sharing of personal health information, and consideration should be given to risks associated with faxing of personal health information. The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Saskatchewan identifies risks associated with faxing personal information, and makes several recommendations in the publication, *Privacy Considerations: Faxing Personal Information and Personal Health Information*. Provincial legislation directs the requirements for collection, use and disclosure of personal information and personal health information, that must be considered in relation to the expectations also set out in standards, competencies, and ethics for privacy and confidentiality (e.g., *The Health Information Protection Act* and *The Health Information Protection Regulations*).

Email communication between health care providers should only occur within secure networks and be limited to non identifiable client information as the confidentiality of emails cannot be guaranteed. It is important to know agency policies on communication, including when various types of communication are acceptable and the required security safeguards.

## 4.6 Client Care Provided Through Electronic Means

Providing nursing care or service delivery through electronic means (e.g., telehealth) is considered to be practicing nursing and thus the interactions must be documented. Electronic care or services includes but is not limited to video/audio conferencing, telephone calls, faxes, emails, or transmittal of data such as diagnostic results or digital photographs. Agency policy should identify how client information obtained through electronic care/services is to be transmitted, recorded and shared among care providers.

When providing care via electronic means when the client cannot be observed, (e.g., telephone) the RN has to rely exclusively on his/her verbal communication skills and the client's self assessment of the situation. As a result documentation may need to be more extensive.

For example:

- it may be prudent to document in detail all the client's subjective comments and related environmental factors;
- it may be necessary to note the date and time of the episode, commenting if there is a time gap between receipt and response to communication, for example, email or telephone voice message and follow-up personal contact; and/or
- it is recommended to reference any standard, policy, protocol, or care plan followed; it is important to document all referrals or suggested next steps for follow-up, for example, instructions to call back if the situation changes.

## 4.7. Client Education

RNs provide a broad range of client education. Comprehensive documentation of client education supports effective planning and reflects the importance of this component of care or service. The RN needs to consider the following when documenting client education:

- document formal (planned education) as well as informal (unplanned) teaching activity;
- written entries about client education should include:
  - a brief description of the material utilized;
  - the method(s) used for teaching (e.g., written, visual, verbal, auditory, and instructional aides used);
  - as applicable, the involvement of and the interaction between client and family in the teaching/learning process;
  - the identification of any outstanding issues or common themes that require follow-up;
  - evaluation of the teaching objectives with validation of client comprehension and learning. For example, "Teaching was provided related to infection. Client accurately described the signs and symptoms of infection and reported accurately that if any of these develop, he would call his nurse";
  - identify follow-up education requirements, handouts and web links provided (CARNA, 2006).

To help promote consistency and to encourage thorough client education it may be beneficial for RNs to advocate for or develop a common template or form to document education activities.

## 4.8 Risk-Taking Behaviours

Some clients, by choice, participate in risk taking behaviours. The following are examples of risk taking behaviors: eating foods identified as a dietary restriction; threatening self-harm, ambulating when bed rest is advised; missing follow-up appointments; leaving against medical advice; refusing or abusing medications and/or illicit drugs; and tampering with medical equipment. Clients may also decline to receive information about their health condition or make choices about which interventions they may or may not accept.

The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (current) identifies the RN's ethical responsibility to respect the capable individual's informed decision making including the choice of lifestyles and treatment not conducive to good health. However it is vital that the RN document the information provided, to whom and the outcomes of the discussion in an unbiased and objective manner (see Section 4.1). Some settings may stipulate that a record of the incident is documented on a separate agency specific

form or electronic file for quality assurance purposes. If the risk taking behavior constitutes a breach of legislation, that requires mandatory reporting such as, child abuse, the RN is required to follow the stipulations in the relevant legislation and document accordingly. It is important in all questionable situations, or if the person is not deemed to be capable, that the nurse is familiar with relevant legislation and agency policies and consults with his/her manager or others as required.

## 4.9 Unanticipated, Unexpected or Abnormal Incident

An unanticipated, unexpected or abnormal incident for a client might include falls, medication errors, delays in service or other undesired situations. Record the facts of the situation including any related care in the client's record without using the words incident, error or accident. Only information relevant to the care of the client should be on the client's record. Documentation should not include conclusions, judgments or assumptions related to the incident/occurrence. In addition, most agencies require employees to document these events on an incident/occurrence report or in a specific electronic file for reasons of continuous quality improvement and risk management. Incident/occurrence reports are separate and distinct documentation from the client's record, and nurses should familiarize themselves with agency policies and procedures. These incidents need to be managed, documented and usually reported internally and often to external agencies.

# 5 When should RNs document?

## 5.1 Timely, Frequently and Chronologically

**Completion of the health care record notes should be done as close to the time of care as possible (also known as contemporaneous documentation) to enhance the credibility and accuracy of health care records (CARNA, 2006).** Documentation should *never* be completed before the care/service is provided. Frequent documentation supports accuracy, particularly when precise assessment is required as a result of changing client conditions or to limit reliance on memory when caring for multiple clients. Charting should be comprehensive, in-depth and frequent as a client's condition progresses towards greater complexity, is very ill or high risk (CNPS, 2007b). The frequency and amount of detail required is generally dictated by a number of factors, including:

- agency policies and procedures;
- complexity of a client's health problems;
- degree to which a client's condition puts him/her at risk;
- degree of risk involved in a treatment or component of care;
- changes in care plan; and
- client transition, e.g., admission/discharge, transfer or transport.

Documenting events in the chronological order in which they took place is important, particularly in terms of revealing changing patterns in a client's health status. Documenting chronologically also enhances the clarity of communications; enabling health care providers to understand what care was provided, based on assessment data, and any outcomes or evaluations of that care, including client responses.

## 5.2 Late or Lost Entries

Record information as soon as possible after the event occurs. When it is not possible to document at the time of or within a reasonable period following an event, a late entry is required. Late entries should be defined in agency policy. Late entries in a health record should be made on a voluntary basis and only when a RN can accurately recall the care provided or the event. Late entries for paper-based health records must be clearly identified and dated with reference to the actual time of documentation as well as the time when the care/event occurred.

In the event of a lost entry (misplaced paper or a computer glitch), the RN may be asked to reconstruct the entry. *The Registered Nurses Act, 1988* states that professional misconduct occurs when a RN has falsified a record with respect to the observation, rehabilitation or treatment of a client [26(2)(i)]. Therefore, the new note must clearly indicate the information recorded is a replacement for a lost entry. If the care/event cannot be recalled, the new entry should state that the information for the specific time of the event has been lost (CRNNS, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Quality documentation is an integral part of professional RN practice. It reflects the application of nursing knowledge, skills and judgment, the clients' perspective and interdisciplinary communications. Documentation establishes accountability, promotes quality nursing care, facilitates communication among RNs and other healthcare providers, and conveys the contribution of nursing to health care. The use of *Why, Who, How, What* and *When* in this guideline, outlines considerations RNs must be mindful of in their practice. By utilizing guidelines, agency policies and best practices RNs demonstrate professional responsibility and accountability in accurate, concise, quality documentation.

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## APPENDIX A - RESOURCES

### Web Resources

| Resource  | Web Site*   |
|---|---|
| Canada Health Infoway   | <a href="https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/">https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/</a>   |
| Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS)   | <a href="http://www.cnps.ca/index_e.html">http://www.cnps.ca/index_e.html</a>   |
| Canadian Nursing Informatics Association  | <a href="http://www.cnia.ca/">http://www.cnia.ca/</a>   |
| Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI)  | <a href="http://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca">http://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca</a>   |
| College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC) Documentation Web Learning Module  | <a href="https://www.crnbc.ca/crnbc/Announcements/2011/Pages/NewLearningModule.aspx">https://www.crnbc.ca/crnbc/Announcements/2011/Pages/NewLearningModule.aspx</a>                       |
| Government of Saskatchewan's Queen's Printer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Health Information Protection Act</i></li> <li>• <i>Health Information Protection Regulations</i></li> </ul> | <a href="http://www.qp.gov.sk.ca/">http://www.qp.gov.sk.ca/</a>   |
| Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP)  | <a href="http://www.ismp.org/">http://www.ismp.org/</a>   |
| Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP-Canada)  | <a href="http://www.ismp-canada.org/">http://www.ismp-canada.org/</a>   |
| Nursing Information System Saskatchewan (NISS)  | <a href="http://www.saho.org/portal.jsp?y3uQUnbK9L2RmSZs02CjVzwWliajEqW5TUMq/IFPga29lmY+Ynrtqw">http://www.saho.org/portal.jsp?y3uQUnbK9L2RmSZs02CjVzwWliajEqW5TUMq/IFPga29lmY+Ynrtqw</a> |
| NurseOne  | <a href="http://www.nurseone.ca/">http://www.nurseone.ca/</a>   |
| Saskatchewan Health Information Resources Partnership (SHIRP)   | <a href="https://www.shirp.ca/">https://www.shirp.ca/</a>   |

\* Links current as of publication.

## Print Resources

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- Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins. (2007). *Complete Guide to Documentation*. North Wales, PA: Springhouse.
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## APPENDIX B - DOCUMENTATION TOOLS AND FORMATS

Different documentation systems and tools have been developed to meet the diverse needs of care settings. There is no one *best* system that will be perfect for all contexts of practice. In fact, in many areas of nursing practice, elements of several systems or methods of documentation are often combined. Regardless of the method of documentation used, it is essential that all RNs are familiar with and follow agency guidelines for the proper utilization/completion of 'charting' in the area they practice. Whenever a system changes, it is important that a plan be devised for implementation, and that the plan include the involvement and education of registered nurses.

The following examples were modified from information obtained from other sources (CNO, 2008; CRNBC, 2008; CRNNS, 2005; NANB, 2002).

### Documentation Tools

There are many tools used for client documentation, including; worksheets and kardexes, client care plans, flow sheets and checklists, care maps, clinical pathways, and monitoring strips.

These tools may be in written or electronic format. Relevant nursing care stemming from health information documented in any of these tools must also be reflected in the client's record (e.g., care initiated in response to an elevated temperature noted on a vital sign form is recorded in progress note).

#### *Care Plans*

Care plans are written outlines of care for individual clients and are part of the permanent record, for each problem and generally include nursing diagnosis, outcomes and interventions. Effective care plans are up-to-date and include the client's needs and goals. If a standardized care plan format is not used, the nurse should ensure that his/her notes identify a plan of care for each assigned client.

#### *Flow Sheets*

Flow sheets and checklists are used to document abbreviated client information. They are:

- frequently recorded information associated with care (e.g., daily living activities, vital signs, intake & output);
- often used in conjunction with other documentation tools;
- visual reminders and are helpful in showing patterns or trends in data and promoting continuity of care or services;
- part of the permanent health record, and can be used as evidence in legal proceedings;
- acceptable practice if it is clear who performed the assessment or intervention and the meaning of each of the symbols is identified in agency policy; and
- cues to ensure necessary components of a procedure have been done and are documented (e.g., consent obtained, IV initiated, gauge number of catheter, presence of blood in hub, proper sharp disposal, IV running, IV connected, bag hung, etc.).

### ***Care Maps, Clinical or Critical Pathways***

Care maps and clinical or critical pathways are forms of charting by exception that outline care that will be done as well as outcomes expected over a specified time frame for a 'usual' client within a case type or grouping. Care maps:

- identify expected outcomes for each day of care for a specific kind of client (e.g. labour/delivery, orthopedic surgery);
- require individualization to meet clients' specific needs (e.g., making changes to items that are not appropriate); and
- mandate how variances are to be recorded.

### ***Worksheets and Kardexes***

Worksheets and kardexes are tools used to communicate client information among providers for the purpose of organizing care, and managing time and multiple priorities. They are paper based or electronic formats used to convey such things as current orders, upcoming tests or surgeries, special diets or the use of aids for independent living specific to an individual client. Agency policy should identify if information on these sources may be erased and or need to be retained as a permanent record. If they are not retained it is important to follow agency policy on discarding to ensure client confidentiality.

### ***Shift Reports***

Shift reports are used to alert the health care team to important information. They:

- generally occur through verbal, or tape recorded but can be written;
- can be used in conjunction with kardexes or worksheets;
- should be addressed in agency policy including the process for maintaining/destroying shift reports and/or erasing/destroying audiotapes; and
- should be linked to the health record where the pertinent information is recorded in detail.

## **Documentation Formats**

A number of charting formats are available. The following is a brief overview of some of these formats.

### ***Narrative Charting***

Narrative charting is the most traditional approach whereby interventions and client responses are written in a paragraph format and recorded in chronological order. The nursing process is often used as the organizing framework.

Historically, different disciplines record in their own section or electronic page of the record. However, Accreditation Canada has identified that this practice limits the ability for interprofessional communication and thus identified that all disciplines should document in the same part of the record. One of the challenges noted with one common document is the need to balance privacy and provision of care by providers who are within the circle of care.

Narrative notes may stand alone or be used in combination with other documentation tools (e.g. flow

sheets). Information noted in one section of a health record may not need to be repeated in another area (e.g., data noted on a flow sheet does not need to be repeated in narrative notes).

However, it may be helpful to make a notation in narrative form that further information related to a specific event/intervention has been recorded in another section (e.g., ‘refer to flow sheet’).

### ***SOAP Charting***

The SOAP format focuses on specific client problems. The client’s current problems are identified and listed on the nursing care plan. There is an optional addition to the SOAP format – Soap I.E.R. that focuses on outcomes and evaluation. Recording is organized under the following headings:

**S** = subjective data (verbalizations of client e.g., how the client feels);

**O** = objective data (measured or observed e.g., relevant vital signs);

**A** = assessment (nursing diagnosis based on data);

**P** = plan (what caregiver plans to do);

**I** = intervention (care, procedures provided);

**E** = evaluation (how plan worked, whether changes are needed); and

**R** = revision (changes, if necessary, to plan of care, based on evaluation).

### ***Focus charting®***

Focus charting is a system that requires RNs to document according to one or more identified foci that reflect the client’s concerns or health needs (e.g., symptom, behavior or event). These foci form the basis of the care plan and are determined during assessment. Recording is organized under the following headings **DAR or DARP**.

**Data** (subjective or objective)

**Action** (nursing interventions)

**Response** (evaluation of effectiveness)

**Plan** (next steps)

### ***PIE Charting***

This format uses a problem-oriented approach and is based on the nursing process. The PIE system consists of a 24-hour daily assessment flow sheet. Quite often, standardized or individual care plans need to be used in conjunction with PIE charting.

**Problems**

**Interventions**

**Evaluation**

### ***Charting by Exception***

Charting by exception is a charting system for RNs to document only those particulars or observations about the client that fall outside expected limits or established standards of care. It assumes all observations fall within expected limits or all care standards have been met with the normal or expected response unless the care giver has documented otherwise. To be effective, all components

of the charting by exception system must be effectively utilized (e.g., flow sheets, care plans and protocols).

When charting by exception it is important to remember:

- a normative baseline for a client must be established;
- all procedures performed including medication administration, vital signs; area specific required observations must be charted;
- any changes in a client's condition must be charted; and
- if you are unsure as to whether something is an exception, chart it.

## APPENDIX C - EXPECTATIONS REGARDING PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

RNs in Saskatchewan are accountable to uphold their professional, legal, and ethical obligations of privacy and confidentiality as articulated in the SRNA *Standards and Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses* and the Canadian Nurses Association *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*, as amended from time to time.

Confidentiality relates to any method or mode of communication used to share pertinent patient health information, and RNs must be accountable and responsible to maintain confidentiality in all circumstances. Potter and Perry (2010) provide the following recommendations regarding confidentiality of information:

1. Do not discuss a client's examination, observation, conversation, or treatment with other clients or with staff who are not involved in the client's care.
2. Only staff directly involved in a specific client's care have legitimate access to the records.
3. Many client's request copies of their health records, and they have the right to read their records.
4. As a nurse, you are also responsible for protecting records from all unauthorized readers. (p. 209)

### Health Information Protection Act

The *Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) passed in Saskatchewan on September 1, 2003 and the *Health Information Protection Regulations* were put into force July 22, 2005. The Act establishes rules related to the collection, use and disclosure of personal health information. It also provides individuals with the right to access and request correction of their own health information. The Act applies to both public and private custodians of personal health information.

The *Health Information Protection Act* ensures consistent rules for all health information regard less of the format of that health information or whether it is held in the public or private system.

Without this Act, personal health information in this province would be subject to different legislation depending on the setting. Public bodies, such as Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) are subject to the HIPA, the *Health Information Protection Regulations*, the *Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (LAFOIP), and the *Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulations*. Additional provincial and/or federal legislation are applicable in certain circumstances and should be reviewed for applicability (e.g., *The Mental Health Services Act*, *The Public Health Act, 1994*). RNs are encouraged to review all applicable agency policies and procedures related to confidentiality and privacy to ensure compliance and accountability.

### Custodian Responsibilities

Whether a health professional works for a Regional Health Authority (RHA), private company, or is in private practice the requirements for privacy are the same and upholding the precepts of the *HIPAA* are essential. In the Act, however, health professionals are listed as custodians of personal health information, but they may also be employees of custodians. For example, a nurse working for the RHA is not the custodian of the personal health information

The custodian is the RHA. If the nurse is the owner of a private business such as foot care then he/she is the custodian and is not only responsible for his/her own actions under the law, but must ensure that employees, agents, other health professionals with rights to work within that business, including volunteers, are aware of their responsibilities under applicable provincial legislation and sign an oath or affirmation of confidentiality. Custodians of personal health information are also required to designate a person to make decisions under the Act. As a custodian health professionals are required by the Act to establish policies and procedures that protect the privacy of personal health information and to protect the confidentiality of individuals as it relates to collection, storage, transfer, copying, modification, use, and disposition of personal health information.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality Safe Guard Tips for Electronic Documentation**

The following safe guards are suggested to ensure the security and confidentiality of client information.

1. Never reveal or allow anyone else access to your personal identification number or password as these are, in fact, electronic signatures.
2. Log off when not using the system or when leaving the terminal.
3. Protect client information displayed on monitors (e.g., use of screen saver, location of monitor, use of privacy screens).
4. Only access client information which is required to provide nursing care for that client; accessing client information for purposes other than providing nursing care is a breach of confidentiality.
5. Ensure all materials that you print or generate that contain client personal health information are secured at all times and shredded or appropriately disposed off when no longer required, (e.g., agendas, schedules, care plans, change of shift report, personal notes, lap tops and mobile client records).
6. Be diligent when sending client information via fax or emails. Make sure all addresses are correct and verified before sending, that the content is limited to what is appropriate to share and that the transmittal was complete (ARNNL, 2010).

## APPENDIX D - QUALITY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS (QPPE) AND DOCUMENTATION

A quality professional practice environment is defined as a workplace that supports professional nursing practice, fosters professional development and promotes the delivery of quality care. As partners in achieving quality care, RNs and employers have a shared responsibility to create practice settings that support effective documentation.

RNs report that due to workload, physical layout, availability of required materials and support in the health care environment they are challenged to find the ‘time to write a good note’. Despite such challenges, SRNA standards and agency policies identify that documentation is a critical responsibility of the RN. The following ideas are posed to help address these challenges.

### How Do I Find the Time to Document?

- Consider the time and financial costs of inadequate documentation.
- Avoid duplication (such as transcribing working notes into the chart).
- Keep charts or flow sheets close to where care is given.
- Review the list of activities you do every day that can be done by someone other than a registered nurse. Documentation cannot be delegated.
- Advocate for more efficient/streamlined documentation tools.

### How Do I Improve my Documentation?

- Review the basic principles of documentation outlined in this document and other references on documentation skills and systems, e.g., agency policies and legal articles.
- Participate in client reviews and chart audits.
- Re-read your entries periodically. Ask yourself does your entry provide enough information for another registered nurse or member of the interdisciplinary team to act. In the event of an incident five years from now is there sufficient information in the documentation? Does the entry meet the standards for nursing practice?
- Advocate for current policies and education on documentation as required.

### How Can I as a Manager Help my Staff Document Better?

- Promote documentation as an integral and core part of practice and professional responsibility.
- Provide appropriate space for registered nurses to have time to reflect and be able to write a thorough and timely entry.
- Seek input from other members of the health care team. Advocate for user-friendly charting policies and systems that demonstrate nursing accountability and professional judgment.
- Advocate for point-of-care charting, such as flow sheets & medication administration records.
- Enhance continuity of care by promoting and supporting interdisciplinary documentation.
- Include nursing staff in chart reviews/audits to increase awareness of gaps in documentation.

## How as an Organization, Can We Help Facilitate Quality Nursing Documentation

- Provide access to an appropriate physical environment that supports and increases efficiency and confidentiality of documentation.
- Provide reliable documentation supplies and equipment available within clinical area.
- Provide equipment that meets ergonomic standards.
- Facilitate nursing staff involvement in choosing, implementing and evaluating the documentation systems.
- Design continual quality improvement activities related to effective documentation.
- Have current policies and procedures on effective documentation and management of client health information.
- Provide RNs with adequate time to document appropriately and review prior documentation.
- Provide staff orientation that includes the introduction of documentation systems and relevant policies and procedures.
- Have performance management processes that provide opportunities to improve documentation.
- Provide support for RNs to develop information and knowledge management competencies.
- Whenever a system changes, it is important that a plan be devised for implementation, and that the plan include the involvement and education of registered nurses.

Adapted from: ARNNL, 2010 and WHO, 2007

NOTES

NOTES

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