

Fatigue and Fitness to Practice

There are a few full-time RNs who almost always volunteer to work overtime hours when the scheduler and I have exhausted every other option. I worry about them becoming so fatigued that this might become unsafe for the clients and the RNs. What is their responsibility in this situation? What is mine as the manager?

RN and RN Manager Responsibility

- Nurses maintain their fitness to practice. If they are aware that they do not have the necessary physical, mental or emotional capacity to practise safely and competently, they withdraw from the provision of care after consulting with their employer or, if they are self-employed, arranging that someone else attend to their clients' health-care needs. Nurses then take the necessary steps to regain their fitness to practice (1).
- Nurses are attentive to signs that a colleague is unable, for whatever reason, to perform his or her duties. In such case, nurses will take the necessary steps to protect the safety of persons receiving care (1).
- The registered nurse is accountable and accepts responsibility for own actions and decisions (2).
- The registered nurse practices in accordance with current CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses and the accompanying responsibility statements (3).
- Managers who suspect that inadequate staffing levels are perpetuating this situation are obligated to examine and address staffing levels.

Non-RN Manager Responsibility

- Depending on your professional designation and background, you may have responsibilities or obligations outlined by a regulatory body. All managers of facilities, departments or units where client care occurs have an obligation to promote safety and to address safety concerns.
- Managers who suspect that inadequate staffing levels are perpetuating this situation are obligated to examine and address staffing levels.

Q&A

- **Is there a specific number of hours of work that are unsafe for RNs?**
No. Each RN is capable of working a different number of hours before they become fatigued. There are many variables to consider, but essentially RNs are responsible for monitoring their own level of competence and fitness to practice. In the short run, they must work with the manager, charge nurse, or supervisor if they believe that they are unable to provide safe care. Then they must take action in the future and make decisions that enable them to consistently be safe.

SRNA Resources

[Standards and Foundation Competencies for Registered Nurses \(2013\)](#)
[CNA Code of Ethics \(2008\)](#)

RN is used to represent all SRNA members including RN(NP)s and RN(AAP)s.

External Resources

[Nurse Fatigue and Patient Safety](#)

[RNAO Best Practice Guidelines - Preventing and Mitigating Nurse Fatigue](#)

| Resource Key | | |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Number | Resource | Reference |
| 1 | Code of Ethics (2008) | Section G, Being Accountable p, 18 |
| 2 | Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses (2013) | Competency 1, p. 9 |
| 3 | Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses (2013) | Competency 62, p. 15 |