

Electronic Distractions in Health Care

At a recent meeting of health care managers, we discussed our observations about how the use of personal electronic devices (PEDs) (e.g. smart phone, tablet, mini-computer) are distracting the staff during paid worktime when they should be focused on providing patient care. One of the managers shared some information she learned at a national conference about this issue becoming an alarming trend due to the addictive nature of this technology. Also, she learned that when there is a major untoward outcome, phone records are starting to be part of the investigation to determine if there are links to electronic distraction that may have contributed to the unfortunate situation. As managers, we want to support appropriate use of stationary and handheld electronics for work purposes but are concerned about patient safety when these devices are increasingly used for personal reasons such as to update social media pages, text family and friends, engage in gaming and other personal activities on work time. What are RNs accountable to in relation to electronics use?

- RNs are accountable and accept responsibility for their own actions and decisions (1).
- RNs provide safe, ethical, competent, compassionate, client-centred and evidence-informed nursing care across the lifespan in response to client needs (2).
- RNs demonstrate a professional presence and confidence, honesty, integrity and respect in all interactions (3).
- RNs exercise professional judgment when using agency policies and procedures, or when practicing in their absence (4).
- RNs demonstrate professional judgment to ensure social media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used in a way that maintains public trust in the profession (5).
- RNs monitor client care to help ensure needed services happen at the right time and in the right sequence (6).
- RNs organize their own workload, assign nursing care, set priorities and demonstrate effective time management skills (7).
- In all areas of practice, RNs safeguard the impact new and emerging technologies can have on patient privacy and confidentiality, professional boundaries, and the professional image of individual RNs and the organizations in which they work (8).

What might be included in an appropriate use policy for electronic devices that I can use on my unit/in my facility?

- Organizations are encouraged to develop and implement policies that fully explain practice expectations and rationale. Setting clear expectations for staff on acceptable behavior when using PEDs (when, where and for what purposes), identifying data ownership and being specific about what information is sensitive and not to be accessed using a PED in the workplace is crucial. This may help mitigate the risks of unnecessary distractions in the workplace, plus the existence of a guiding policy that provides clear direction may protect the workplace should an untoward outcome occur.

Are there other implications of personal electronic device use in the workplace that I should be aware of as a manager?

Two important considerations are related to Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC), and privacy and confidentiality issues.

- RNs implement evidence-informed practices for infection prevention and control (9).
- In the use of social media, RNs safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of persons and other colleagues (10).

SRNA Resources

[Code of Ethics for registered nurses \(2017\)](#)

[Registered Nurse Practice Standards \(2019\)](#)

[Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies \(2019\)](#)

External Resources

[Canadian Nurses Protective Society \(CNPS\) Mobile Devices in the Workplace](#)

Resource Key		
Number	Resource	Reference
1	Registered Nurse Practice Standards (2019)	Indicator 1, page 4
2	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 1.1, page 6
3	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 2.2, page 8
4	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 2.3, page 8
5	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 2.8, page 8
6	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 5.2, page 10
7	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 5.3, page 10
8	Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics (2017)	E11, page 15
9	Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies (2019)	Competency 1.27, page 7
10	Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics (2017)	E10, page 15

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