

**National Student Nurses' Association, Inc.®**

**Code of Ethics: Part II  
Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct  
and Interpretive Statements**

*Adopted by the NSNA Board of Directors, October 27, 2009 in Phoenix, AZ*

As students are involved in clinical and academic environments we believe that ethical principles are a necessary guide to professional development. The following *Interpretive Statements* are offered as a framework to help guide nursing students in ethical analysis of responsibilities, professional conduct, and decision making in academic and clinical settings as they adhere to the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students*.

*\*\* Indicates sections taken directly from the NSNA Code of Ethics: Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct*

**Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct**

**\*\* Students of nursing have a responsibility to society in learning the academic theory and clinical skills needed to provide safe, quality nursing care. The clinical setting presents unique challenges and responsibilities for the nursing student while caring for human beings in a variety of health care environments.**

**\*\* The *Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct* is based on an understanding that to practice nursing as a student is an agreement to uphold the trust society has placed in us. The statements of the code provide guidance for nursing students in their personal development of an ethical foundation and need not be limited strictly to the academic or clinical environment, but can assist in the holistic development of the person.**

**\*\* As students are involved in the clinical and academic environments we believe that ethical principles are a necessary guide to professional development. Therefore, within these environments we:**

**\*\* 1. Advocate for the rights of all clients.**

**1.1 Advocacy:** A responsibility of nursing students is to advocate for the rights of all clients. This requires the nursing student to understand the client's rights and responsibilities, the scope and applicable standards of nursing practice to meet the client needs,

and the relevant federal (e.g. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Patient Self-Determination Act, etc), state (e.g. Nurse Practice Act, etc.), and local laws in accordance with the health care institution's policies and procedures. This knowledge enables the nursing student to function as an advocate for the rights of all clients in collaboration with nursing faculty and members of the health care team.

**1.2 Rights of clients:** Nursing students provide care for persons who have rights both as human beings and as clients. As such, nursing students must be cognizant of public, professional and institutional policies concerning patients' rights and access to resources across the care continuum. For example, nursing students help ensure that these fundamental rights of clients to receive culturally and linguistically appropriate services are protected and maintained.

**\*\* 2. Maintain client confidentiality.**

**2.1 Confidentiality:** Access to and sharing of information that identifies a specific client, their condition, and other information must be guarded with the best interests of the client in mind. Access to and sharing of such information must be limited to only those personnel with the medical need to know and family members who are authorized by institutional policy and patient consent (according to HIPAA guidelines).

**2.2 Academic Setting:** In discussing client cases in the academic setting, care must be taken to avoid breaching confidentiality and violating HIPAA regulations; this includes appropriate selection of the time and place of discussion, people attending the discussion, and omitting data that is not necessary to the purpose of the discussion or that discloses the client's personal identity.

**2.3 Special Circumstances:** In order to protect the safety of the patient, other parties, and in cases of mandatory disclosure for public health reasons there may be times where the nursing student is obligated to report confidential information. The nursing student must immediately share these concerns in a confidential setting with the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor and with the registered nurse in charge of the patient's care who will provide appropriate guidance.

**\*\* 3. Take appropriate action to ensure the safety of clients, self, and others.**

**3.1 Appropriate action to ensure safety of clients:** The nursing student must be able to identify hazardous conditions which may include faulty equipment, an unsafe environment, incompetent practices of other healthcare team members and colleagues, suspicious persons and activities, and self limitations. If an unsafe condition or incident becomes apparent, the nursing student should use good judgment and follow institutional policies and procedures for emergencies, reporting hazardous conditions and incidents. The nursing student should be aware of personnel responsible for directing patient and personnel safety and immediately share these concerns with the registered nurse in charge of the patient's care and with the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor.

**3.2 Safety of self:** Nursing students cannot be expected to work in unsafe conditions or in situations where they are incompetent to practice. Academic and clinical environments should allow for a nursing student to voice concerns about safety to self without retribution. Nursing students have the responsibility to come prepared to meet the objectives assigned in caring for clients in clinical settings and to ask questions.

**3.3 Safety of others:** Nursing students should not condone or participate in lateral violence or incivility towards other professionals, students, or faculty. Further, students observing such behavior should take appropriate steps to remove her/himself from the situation and report to the nursing faculty or clinical preceptor .

**\*\* 4. Provide care for the client in a timely, compassionate and professional manner.**

**4.1 Timely care:** Client care is time sensitive. Therefore, nursing students should be aware that adhering to the schedule set forth by the health care team is important and discharge planning should begin upon the client's admission to the clinical environment. By prioritizing tasks, patient education, treatments and procedures the nursing student will ensure that they are utilizing time in the most effective and efficient way.

**4.2 Compassionate care:** Providing care with compassion creates a better nursing student-client relationship. It reflects the nursing student's desire to respect the client as an individual, to help the

client maintain their safety and dignity, to provide support and comfort , to assist the client to achieve optimal independence and meet their health goals.

**4.3 Professional care:** Professional communication, appearance, and behavior by the nursing student demonstrates respect for the client and for self. The nursing student has the responsibility to be prepared to meet the objectives assigned in caring for clients and to demonstrate safe, quality nursing care. These professional actions by the nursing student enhance the image of nursing and contribute to building a trusting relationship between the nursing student and the client, and between the nursing student and the health care team. An essential component of professional care by the nursing student and the health care team in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to assure that the client receives culturally and linguistically appropriate health education and services (NSNA Resolution #15, 2009).

**\*\* 5. Communicate client care in a truthful, timely and accurate manner.**

**5.1 Truthful communication:** Veracity is key to developing trusting relationships in academic and clinical environments. Truthful and thorough communication between nursing students and nursing faculty or preceptors, and between nursing students and healthcare professionals is a key component to providing safe, quality care within an optimal clinical learning environment.

**5.2 Timely communication:** Communicating client care information at the appropriate time is a duty of nursing students. Timely communication allows for assessments, interventions, and that changes to the plan of care be initiated and completed in a timely manner.

**5.3 Accurate communication:** Accurate communication is a responsibility of the nursing student. The nursing student, by providing an accurate, concise and timely report on the client's assessment and status changes helps the nurse in charge of the client's care and the primary care provider to make informed client care decisions and follow-up with further assessment as required.

**\*\* 6. Actively promote the highest level of moral and ethical principles and accept responsibility for our actions.**

**6.1 Promote the highest level of moral and ethical principles:**

Nursing students should be familiar with the *NSNA Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* and the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students (Part I: Code of Professional Conduct and Part II: Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct)* and supporting documents. Being well informed and encouraging others to read and adhere to the *NSNA Code of Ethics for Nursing Students* and the *ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (ANA House of Delegates, 2001)* actively promotes the values and ethics of the nursing profession. Acting under ethical principles ensures that the care being provided does not jeopardize the client's basic rights or endanger professional relationships.

**6.2 Accepting responsibility for our actions:** Nursing students are accountable to the educational institution, the health care institution that provides the clinical learning environment, and above all to clients and society as a whole. The nursing student must function within the state's Nurse Practice Act, the *Scope and Standards of Nursing Practice* (American Nurses' Association, 2004) and the Policies and Procedures of the health care institution. The nursing student will care for clients only under the supervision of the nursing faculty or preceptor. Supervision must be completed in accordance with the clinical education agreement between the nursing program and the health institution providing a clinical learning environment to meet the student's clinical learning objectives.

**\*\* 7. Promote excellence in nursing by encouraging lifelong learning and professional development.**

**7.1 Excellence in Nursing:** Nursing is a profession that demands a nursing student's commitment to evidence-based practice and to the health, well-being, and safety of clients. The client willingly gives the nursing student their trust in her/his ability to provide nursing care in accordance with their clinical education objectives.

**7.2 Encouraging lifelong learning:** The health care environment is ever changing. Nursing students, after attaining licensure as a registered nurse, have a responsibility to continue to educate themselves formally and informally throughout their careers to remain clinically competent to meet the health care needs of an increasingly diverse client population across an ever changing health care environment.

**7.3 Professional development:** Professionalism is a key factor for gaining the trust of others. Participation in professional organizations is imperative to one's professional development. It begins by nursing students becoming active members and participants in NSNA; participants in nursing research utilization to advance evidence-based practice (NSNA Resolution #3, 2009); and in advocating for interdisciplinary education opportunities (NSNA Resolution # 13, 2009). Professional development continues for registered nurses as evidenced by membership in state nurses association (ANA) and specialty nursing organizations, and through continuing formal education.

**\*\* 8. Treat others with respect and promote an environment that respects human rights, values and choice of cultural and spiritual beliefs.**

**8.1 Treat others with respect:** Nursing is based on client care that is supported by a foundation of respect and trust. Respect should be a fundamental component of intra-professional and inter-professional collaboration in which the nursing student participates (*Nursing's Social Policy Statement*, ANA, 2003).

**8.2 Promote an environment that respects human rights:** As members of NSNA, nursing students pledge to refuse to engage in, or condone discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, lifestyle, disability, or economic status (*NSNA Code of Ethics: Part One, 1999; NSNA Bylaws, Article III Purpose and Functions, Section 2, item f, 2007*). By providing an atmosphere that allows clients to voice their needs, and to collaborate with the health care team, clients are empowered to meet their health care goals.

**8.3 Values:** All clients have a unique set of beliefs that form their values. Nursing students are obligated to holistically provide care to clients in ways that respect the client's belief system and empowers them to attain their health goals.

**8.4 Choice of cultural and spiritual beliefs:** All individuals have a unique set of values that are influenced by their culture and spirituality. Nursing students have a responsibility to demonstrate respect for the client by seeking to understand the client's health care goals, their strengths and values, their cultural and spiritual beliefs, and how they influence and support the client's care.

**\*\* 9. Collaborate in every reasonable manner with the academic faculty and clinical staff to ensure the highest quality of client care**

**9.1 Collaborate in every reasonable manner:** Clinical learning environments are places for applying the skills that nursing students have learned in the classroom and nursing lab. Nursing students are compelled to deliver the highest quality of care possible in these clinical learning environments. If the student has questions or needs clarification on a procedure or nursing intervention they are obligated to refer those questions to the nursing faculty or preceptor assigned to manage the student's clinical learning experience. The client's safety is the highest priority and the student should not let their questions go unanswered.

**\*\* 10. Use every opportunity to improve faculty and clinical staff understanding of the learning needs of nursing students.**

**10.1 Nursing is a fast paced ever-changing field that leaves little or no room for error.** It is imperative for nursing students to communicate what they are learning as well as the need for further education in a clinical practice area through any means possible such as, verbal conferences and written evaluations. Learning as a process may vary for each individual student. However, each student shares responsibility for ongoing evaluation of their clinical learning and participates as an active learner by demonstrating and documenting that their clinical learning objectives have been met and maintained.

**\*\* 11. Encourage faculty, clinical staff, and peers to mentor nursing students.**

**11.1 Encourage faculty:** Nursing faculty are an important and readily available source of information and serve as role models for professional practice .By encouraging faculty to mentor students in evidence-based practice, in professional involvement in NSNA as a student, and in other nursing organizations after graduation, nursing programs prepare students to advocate for clients and to provide safe quality nursing care.

**11.2 Encourage staff:** Clinical staff and clinical preceptors are important sources of information about safe quality nursing practice and evidence-based Policies and Procedures in the clinical

practice environment. By encouraging staff to mentor nursing students and to role model professional behaviors, health care institutions can create welcoming and effective learning environments.

**11.3 Encourage peers:** Peer mentoring has a unique advantage because of the shared experience of being a nursing student. Peers provide a different perspective on a nursing student's performance than faculty or staff, which can be facilitated through peer reviews and discussions. These reviews promote a career-long activity of collaborative learning and peer mentoring, and should be practiced as a component of clinical learning.

**\*\* 12. Refrain from performing any technique or procedure for which the student has not been adequately trained.**

**12.1 Operating within appropriate scope of practice:** The client's well being is the highest priority. By performing procedures or interventions that the student is not ready to perform, the student and faculty are placing the client's well being in jeopardy. The student must inform the faculty or clinical preceptor assigned to supervise the clinical experience whenever they are unprepared to safely provide an assigned intervention or procedure. This allows the faculty or clinical preceptor to provide the needed information for safely conducting the procedure.

**\*\* 13. Refrain from any deliberate action or omission of care in the academic or clinical setting that creates unnecessary risk of injury to the client, self or others.**

**13.1 Academic or clinical setting:** Nursing students must recognize that actions influence the reputation of the nursing program and the profession of nursing. Therefore, whether on campus or in clinical settings, nursing students have a responsibility to come prepared to provide safe quality nursing care under the direction of the faculty or preceptor. By not engaging as an active learner or violating the nursing program's code of conduct (i.e. not coming prepared to class, missing a significant amount of class time, cheating or condoning other student's actions to cheat on exams, etc.) violates ethical and academic responsibilities of nursing students and future nurses. As an NSNA member, nursing students pledge in the *NSNA Code of Professional Conduct* (1999) to refrain from any form of cheating or dishonesty, and take action to report dishonorable practices to proper authorities using established channels.

### **13.2 Creating unnecessary risk of injury to the client, self, or others:**

Nursing students have shared responsibility with the health care team for maintaining the safety of clients, themselves, and others in the academic and clinical learning environment. Any action that creates the potential for harm or increases the risk for failure to maintain and support the physical or mental integrity of clients, self, or others is contradictory to these responsibilities. Competent delegation and supervision is a shared responsibility between the registered nurses and the health care team to control for unnecessary risks of injury to the client, self, or others. Nursing education should provide nursing students with opportunities to develop competencies related to delegation, including assessment and planning, communication, surveillance and supervision, evaluation and feedback (National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), 2005; NCSBN & ANA, 2006).

### **13.3 Refraining from any deliberate action or omission of care that creates unnecessary risk to the client, self, or others:**

Knowingly withholding action, acts of omission of care, and deliberate actions that create unnecessary risk to the client, self, or others is a violation of the ethical and professional responsibilities of nursing students. Such acts are subject to review by the academic institution, and others as deemed appropriate.

## **\*\* 14. Assist the staff nurse or preceptor in ensuring that there is a full disclosure and that proper authorizations are obtained from clients regarding any form of treatment or research.**

**14.1 Assist staff or preceptor:** While the nursing student may observe and assist the staff nurse or preceptor with the education and care of the client, primary responsibility for informed consent and managing and implementing the plan of care/research protocols remains with the physician/primary care provider/researcher in collaboration with the client, the staff nurse, and health care team.

**14.2 Ensuring that there is full disclosure:** The nursing student should immediately, in a confidential setting, make full disclosure of any questions the client verbalizes and any concerns pertaining to the client's safety, privacy, or informed consent to the nursing faculty or preceptor as well as to the staff nurse assigned to the client.

**14.3 Proper authorizations are obtained from clients:** The staff nurse assigned to provide the client's care has the responsibility with the physician/primary care provider/researcher to assure that the client understands the treatment and/or research being provided and that proper authorizations are obtained from client after all of the client's questions are answered (National Institutes of Health (NIH), 2006).

**14.4 Regarding any from of treatment or research:** Human subject research requires that participants be given full disclosure of the purpose and procedures in the research study, including the potential benefits and risks. The client maintains the right to decide to participate or not to participate in the research (NIH, 2006).

**\*\* 15. Abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages or any substances in the academic and clinical setting that impair judgment.**

**15.1 Abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages or any substances that impair judgment:** Nursing students strive to promote client, family, co-worker, and self safety in academic and clinical settings. This cannot be accomplished when health professionals or nursing students are under the influence of any substance, legal or illegal, which impairs judgment. Impaired decision-making can contribute to poor patient outcomes and can lead to disciplinary action.

**15.2 In the academic and clinical setting:** In classroom and clinical settings nursing students gain opportunities to build their critical thinking skills and learn to make sound clinical judgments. Nursing students should hold their colleagues and peers to this same standard. In that regard, if one suspects a colleague of alcohol or substance intake, he or she should discuss the situation in a confidential setting with the nursing faculty or preceptor.

**\*\* 16. Strive to achieve and maintain an optimal level of personal health.**

**16.1 Optimal level of personal health:** As agents of a research-based industry we must remember the objective and scientific guidelines of optimal health. Taking care of one's self is important to providing good nursing care. Personal health encompasses both physical and mental health.

**16.2 Striving to achieve and maintain:** It is important for nursing students to be familiar with and routinely practice a *healthy* lifestyle. Nursing students and nurses are ambassadors, role models, and health educators for clients. It is an important responsibility for nursing students to maintain their own physical and mental health to provide safe quality nursing care to clients.

**\*\* 17. Support access to treatment and rehabilitation for students who are experiencing impairments related to substance abuse and mental or physical health issues.**

**17.1 Support access to treatment and rehabilitation for students experiencing impairment:** Nursing students should be familiar with the established policies and regulations related to substance abuse. Nursing students who are substance abusers must seek assistance to address this issue. By not doing so places both the student and clients in jeopardy and may result in dismissal from the program; disqualification for taking the licensure examination; and in the case of professional misconduct or malpractice, may result in legal action.

**17.2 Mental or physical health issues:** Nursing students suffering from mental and/or physical health issues must address these issues as soon as they become known. Assistance may be available at the student health center or other providers either on or off campus. By maintaining a high level of mental and physical health, nursing students will have the capacity to help others.

**\*\* 18. Uphold school policies and regulations related to academic and clinical performance, reserving the right to challenge and critique rules and regulations as per school grievance policy.**

**18.1 Uphold school policies and regulations related to academic and clinical performance:** Adherence to the rules and regulations that are established for students including honesty, integrity, and professionalism within all academic and clinical settings is imperative. Nursing students must hold themselves and others accountable to these high standards. Being aware of the rules, regulations, and policies is part of this accountability; ignorance is not an excuse for violations.

**18.2 Reserving right to challenge and critique rules and regulations as per school grievance policy:** Nursing students have the right to challenge and critique rules and regulations following the process outlined in the school's grievance policy. Student perspectives and evaluations should be integral components of quality improvement for classroom and clinical learning environments, and the curriculum. NSNA adopted the *Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (NSNA House of Delegates, 1975, 1991, 2006)* and *Grievance Procedures (NSNA Board of Directors, 1975, 1991)* to provide nursing students, faculty, and nursing programs a resource for developing and revising school grievance policies. Nursing students have a responsibility for adequate preparation for participation in academic classroom and nursing lab environments, and for safe quality clinical practice under the direction and supervision of nursing faculty and clinical preceptors.

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### References and Resources:

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### ***Guidelines on Living Healthy***

See the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for more detailed information and guidelines on living healthy:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyLiving/>.

### ***Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Patient Self Determination Act***

See the National Institutes of Health (NIH) training site for an introduction to legal issues in clinical research, including content on HIPPA and the Patient Self Determination Act presented by Valerie H. Bonham, Office of the General Counsel, NIH on December 11, 2006:  
<http://www.nihtraining.com/cc/ipocr/current/downloads/Bonham121106>

### ***Standards of Care***

See this site for information on the “standard of care”:  
<http://www.jointcommission.org/Standards/FAQs/2009+Standards+FAQs.htm>