

JOINT STATEMENT

Dispensing medications

Regulations under the [Health Professions Act](#) set out scope of practice for health professionals. Many aspects of scope are shared between professions (including dispensing).

Under the [Nurses \(Registered\) and Nurse Practitioners Regulation](#), registered nurses and nurse practitioners have authority to dispense medications.

What is nurse dispensing?

Dispensing by nurses includes the preparation and transfer of a medication for a client,

- taking steps to ensure the pharmaceutical and therapeutic suitability of the medication for its intended use, and
- taking steps to ensure its proper use.

It may also include accepting payment for a medication on behalf of a nurse's employer.

When does it occur?

Dispensing occurs when a nurse gives medication to a client or their delegate for administration at a later time. Examples of dispensing include when:

- The client is leaving the facility on a day pass and needs their medication when away,
- The client is being discharged from the emergency department and needs medication started.

What are nurses' responsibilities when they dispense?

- When a pharmacist has reviewed a medication's pharmaceutical and therapeutic suitability, nurses take steps to ensure its proper use.
- When a pharmacist has not reviewed a medication's pharmaceutical and therapeutic suitability (or it is unclear whether this has occurred), nurses take steps to ensure the pharmaceutical and therapeutic suitability of the medication for the client, as well as its proper use.

More information about these responsibilities is outlined in BCCNM's Practice Standard *Medication*. The responsibilities were developed in consultation with the College of Pharmacists of BC (CPBC).

What are the limits on dispensing by nurses?

Registered nurses must have an order from another health professional (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner) to dispense some medications. For information about medications that may be dispensed autonomously and medications that need a dispensing order, see scope of practice information on BCCNM's website.

Nurses practice in many different roles (e.g., BCCNM-certified in Remote Practice), different settings (e.g., emergency department) and with different client populations (e.g., pediatric clients, the elderly). BCCNM requires that nurses dispense **only**:

- when it is in the best interest of the client, and
- for clients under their care.

This means that nurses have to think critically about whether it is appropriate for them to dispense in a particular situation. Nurses will need to consider things like:

- their own competence
- the complexity of the dispensing request
- the complexity of the client's medication profile
- access to relevant client information
- access to resources to support their decision-making.

In some situations, it may be more appropriate for a pharmacist to dispense the medications than for a nurse to dispense them. If dispensing the medications does not appear to be in the client's best interest, nurses will need to take appropriate action. For example, they might discuss the situation with the ordering health professional to determine the best course of action.

How do nurses document medications they have dispensed?

Nurses are not able to document medications dispensed in PharmaNet. Instead, they document in the client record and need to consider:

- who has access to this information,
- who else needs to be informed, and
- how to communicate the information, including how quickly.

Where can I go for more information?

The Nursing Standards on BCCNM's website: www.bccnm.ca

BCCNM's [Medication practice standard](#)

BCCNM's [Scope of Practice for Nurse Practitioners: Standards, Limits, Conditions](#)

BCCNM's [Scope of Practice for Registered Nurses: Standards, Limits, Conditions](#)

College of Pharmacists of British Columbia resources www.bcpharmacists.org

Contact a BCCNM nursing practice consultant or advisor at 604.742.6200 x8803 or 1.866.880.7101 x8803 or email practice@bccnm.ca

Contact the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia at 604.733.2440 or 1.800.663.1940 or email practiceinquiries@bcpharmacists.org

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