

# Cannabis

## Questions & Answers

### What is the difference between medical cannabis and recreational cannabis?

Medical cannabis is generally used to alleviate symptoms of a disease or disorder while minimizing the intoxicating effects of the drug. Medical cannabis is authorized by a prescriber who provides a medical document allowing individuals to obtain the cannabis from a licensed producer or apply to Health Canada to grow their own. Currently in Nova Scotia, physicians are the only authorized prescriber of medical cannabis. For further information on medical cannabis please see the [Health Canada website](#).

Recreational cannabis is generally used for its euphoric effects. It is anticipated that sometime in 2018 recreational cannabis will become legal. Until the federal legislation is passed, the use of recreational cannabis is illegal.

### If a nurse is authorized to use medical cannabis can they still work?

Nurses are always accountable to meet their Standards of Practice, regardless of their medical condition and treatment plan. Nurses may be able to continue to work while being treated with medical cannabis. Medical cannabis would be no different than another prescribed medication, for example an opioid for chronic pain, which could impact their ability to provide safe, competent, compassionate and ethical nursing care while meeting their Standards of Practice.

Every nurse is accountable to assess their fitness to practice. Fitness to practice means the nurse has the necessary physical, mental and emotional health to provide care that meets the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. If the nurse decides that the use of the medical cannabis is preventing them from making appropriate care decisions or meeting their standards of practice, the nurse should refrain from practice and discuss the situation with their immediate manager and/or their occupational health nurse. They may also want to consider discussing the situation with the health care provider who authorized the use of the medical cannabis.

There may be circumstances when the nurse is not able to self-assess and may require an assessment by others who can determine if the nurse is able to provide safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care. Resources which may be useful in a situation like this may be:

- Primary care provider
- Employee assistance program
- The College Practice Consultants
- Employer policy



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## What should I do if one of my colleagues takes a break on nights and when they return I hear them say they consumed cannabis brownies? How do I know if they are safe to look after clients?

This situation could be a professional practice issue which all nurses are obligated to address according to the Standards of Practice<sup>1</sup>. The first step would be to verify if this information is factual and accurate. If you suspect a colleague is impaired, ensuring client safety is the first priority. In order for nurses to respond appropriately when they suspect impairment in a co-worker, they need to be able to recognize possible signs and symptoms.

If the nurse is impaired and may pose a threat to client safety, immediately take steps to ensure client safety. You should notify your supervisor, manager or employer right away and document your actions. Based on this consultation you or the supervisor, manager or employer may be required to remove the nurse from the practice environment and client care. Remember, your ultimate responsibility is to ensure the safety of the clients.

For more information on incapacity and/or problematic substance use see the following College and government resources:

- [Fitness to Practice and Incapacity Guidelines](#) (CLPNNS)
- [Impairment: Cannabis in the Workplace Handout](#) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety)
- [Problematic Substance Use in the Workplace: Practice Guideline](#) (CRNNS)

## One of my nurse colleagues posted pictures on their public social media account of them partying (drinking and smoking cannabis) should I say anything to them? Does this pose a risk to client safety?

Self-regulated professionals face a higher level of scrutiny in their public life than the average person and any activity they engage in on social media can be viewed and judged by the world (American Nurses Association, 2011). Nurses are required to demonstrate behaviours that uphold the public trust in the profession and are responsible and accountable for their actions and decisions. Any breach of trust, even inadvertent, has potential to damage the nurse-client relationship, could pose a risk to client safety and the general trustworthiness of the profession of nursing. Inappropriate use of social media could be considered a breach of the Standards of Practice.

Nurses should maintain the same level of professionalism when using social media as they would when communicating face-to-face. You should discuss your concerns about your colleague's social media presence in a private place away from clients and others. It will be important for you to discuss the potential risks not only to client care, but to their professional reputation. You should refer to your organizational social media policy and your code of conduct as tools in this discussion.

For further information on social media see the following College resources:

[Position Statement: Social Media](#) (CLPNNS)

[Social Media Guidelines for RNs and NPs](#) (CRNNS)

## The organization I work at does not have a policy related to cannabis in the workplace. What is my responsibility?

Nurses can benefit from a clear process/policy related to cannabis use in the workplace. Lack of a clear process and policies can make it difficult for nurses to meet their Standards of Practice. Nurses should advocate for clear process and policies related to cannabis and engage with their employer in the development of these policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Standard of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada Standard 1 Professional Accountability and Responsibility, Standards of Practice for RNs Standard 5 Individual Self- Regulation Indicator 5.5