

# Professional Presence

A Guideline for Nurses

## Introduction

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Nova Scotia (CLPNNS) and the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (CRNNS) are legislated to serve and protect the public interest through the regulation of individual licensed practical nurses (LPNs), nurse practitioners (NPs) and registered nurses (RNs). Only LPNs, NPs and RNs or students of a nursing program may use the title of nurse. In this document nurse will refer to all three classes (RN Act, 2006).

This document is designed to assist nurses in understanding their professional presence obligations and to offer guidance to meet this standard of practice. Every nurse in Nova Scotia is expected to demonstrate professional behavior and leadership in their practice as part of meeting their Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

## What is professional presence?

Professional presence is the demonstration of respect, confidence, integrity, optimism, passion and empathy in accordance with professional standards, guidelines and codes of ethics. It includes a nurse's verbal and nonverbal communications and the ability to articulate a positive role and professional image, including the use of full name and title. The demonstration of professional presence leads to trusting relationships with clients, families, communities and other health care team members.

Professional presence can be demonstrated through:

- active listening
- attentiveness
- therapeutic touch
- empathy
- caring
- compassion
- recognition of the clients psychological, psychosocial and physiological needs
- respect
- integrity
- understanding a client's cultural context and demonstrating cultural competence

Demonstrating professional presence is one of the most powerful and important ways nurses can establish a therapeutic nurse-client relationship.

Professional presence is also about awareness of the nursing image you portray to other team members. Professional presence includes developing positive and effective collaborative relationships in a professional context with other nurses, the health care team, your regulatory body, and other stakeholders such as government, other agencies, associations or unions.

## What is the role of the nurse?

### With Clients

Nurses build trust when they establish caring and therapeutic relationships with clients. Exhibiting professional presence is a requirement of the therapeutic relationship. Nurses are expected to demonstrate a professional presence with clients to develop a trusting therapeutic relationship as part of meeting their Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

### With Interprofessional Teams

Nurses must be aware of the importance of a positive image of nursing. Nurses should be able to explain to clients, colleagues, other health professionals and stakeholders the role of nursing. Nurses should articulate what their contribution to health care is and express the value and difference they make in communities and health care teams. This is a key component to having other members of the team understand the role of the nurse.

## How do nurses demonstrate professional presence?

Demonstrating professional presence requires a nurse to be attentive in the moment and to be engaged with the client and their family. Clients report that everything nurses say or do, however big or small, may be analyzed, amplified and worried over. A nurse's facial expression, tone of voice, body language and choice of words can convey an unintended message. While a nurse may believe they did a good job administering medication on time or the obtaining venous access on the first attempt, the client may feel very differently because of the nurse's presence, or lack of presence in the moment (Fahlburg, 2016).

The following strategies may assist nurses in demonstrating a professional presence with clients:

### Verbal Communication

- Speak in a polite tone and ensure the message is respectful
- Speak with confidence and compassion

### Non-verbal Communication

- Make eye contact when appropriate while considering the client's cultural context
- Meet the client at their level and sit when appropriate
- Use therapeutic touch appropriately

### Focus

- Limit distractions
- Provide intentional focus
- Use technology appropriately ensuring it is enhancing the therapeutic relationship and not impeding it

### Empathize

- Consider how it would feel to hear your words if you were the client
- Listen to understand
- Ask questions

Professional presence isn't just when a nurse is face-to-face with clients but anytime a nurse is visible to clients, like being in the hallway or at the desk. For example, clients may overhear nonprofessional conversations by nurses outside their room that may affect their trust and the therapeutic relationship between them and their nurses.

Sometimes all that is required is an intentional focus in the time nurses have. In that sense it is more about making the most of the time nurses have with the client. Quality is more important than quantity.

## Conclusion

Nurses are an integral part of the health care team. They are accountable to provide safe, competent, ethical and compassionate care to their clients. Professional presence is crucial to trusting therapeutic relationships between nurses, clients, the public and their health care colleagues. Nurses are expected to continually reflect on, and evolve their behavior to ensure their practice is consistent with their Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

## Need support or have a question?

If you need support or if you have questions about this topic, contact the College's Professional Practice Consultants at any time for additional information: [practiceconsultant@clpnns.ca](mailto:practiceconsultant@clpnns.ca) (CLPNNS) or [practice@crnns.ca](mailto:practice@crnns.ca) (CRNNS).

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