



Position Statement

As self-regulating professionals, nurses are responsible and accountable for their own practice and actions at all times. However, their accountabilities can become blurred when they hold licences to practise concurrently as both a licensed practical nurse (LPN) and a registered nurse (RN) with the Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN).

Although dual licensure is permitted within the law, NSCN does not support it and does not recommend that nurses practise concurrently as licensed practical nurses and registered nurses. In a nurse's work environments, dual licensure can create role confusion, accountability/liability issues for nurses and their employers, and can potentially impact the quality of care provided to clients and their families.

Nurses who hold dual licensure may also be put in vulnerable positions or be professionally compromised if an employer is unaware of or disregards the differences in the responsibilities and accountabilities associated with each category of nursing licence. For example, a nurse may be employed as an LPN but requested by an employer to function at the level of an RN. Nurses holding dual licensure, along with their employers, are responsible to communicate with each other regarding employers' expectations and nurses' responsibilities.

Note: Although this position statement highlights risks and makes recommendations for nurses holding both an LPN and RN licence concurrently, it also applies to LPNs or RNs working as unlicensed assistive personnel (e.g., CCA) or nurse practitioners (NPs) working as RNs.

Risks for Nurses Holding Dual Licensure

There are several risks when nurses hold dual licensure related to:

1. **Role Confusion:** this can be an issue for both clients and nurses. For example, a nurse is working as an RN on one shift initiates a care plan for a new client admitted to her unit. On the following day, while working as an LPN, her RN colleagues might expect her to do the same thing when they are all busy and a new client is admitted.
2. **Scope of Practice:** Nurses holding dual licensure may find it difficult to remember which scope of practice applies to them when they change their nursing role from one day to another or within one shift. For instance, a nurse working as an RN in an emergency department for one shift and then extends their shift by four hours to work as an LPN may forget that, as an LPN, they might share responsibility but not assume accountability for an unstable trauma client that they cared for earlier in the day.
3. **Accountability:** When an LPN with dual licensure is caring for a client whose condition deteriorates unexpectedly (e.g., an emergency situation), the LPN may be expected to perform at their highest level of accountability and scope of practice until relieved by an RN. In other words, the LPN would be expected to immediately function as an RN until relieved of this responsibility. Additionally, if a complaint is lodged against an LPN holding dual licensure, the LPN may be held to the RN level of accountability.



Nursing Practice Hours

Each nursing category (LPN, RN, NP) has their own unique scope of practice. Hours accumulated while working in the scope of practice of one nursing category may not be used to satisfy the practice hour requirement for another category of nurse. For example, hours worked as an LPN cannot be included in the nursing practice hour requirement for RN license renewal.

Scope of Practice/Scope of Employment

Nurses holding dual licensure, as well as their employers, must be aware of and understand the distinct scope of practice associated with each of their two nursing licences. Nurses holding dual licensure must also balance their job responsibilities (i.e., scope of employment) with their individual knowledge, skills and judgment (competencies) in order to provide safe, ethical, compassionate, and competent care.

Recommendations

NSCN recommends that nurses holding dual licensure choose one licence and voluntarily rescind the other licence to the relevant regulatory body.

NSCN also advises nurses who choose to maintain dual licensure should not practise on one unit (care area) as both an RN and an LPN and should not to practise as both an RN and LPN during any employment shift.

In the event that a nurse holding dual licensure chooses to practise concurrently as both an LPN and RN on one unit or during one shift, they are advised to inform their clients and the interdisciplinary team as to whether they are practising as an LPN or RN. The same would apply to those employed by external or contract agencies.

NSCN also recommends that employers not permit nurses holding dual licensure to practise concurrently as both an LPN and an RN on the same unit or same shift.