



Royal College
of Nursing



Accountability and Delegation

Your pocket guide



Our Accountability and Delegation resource explains principles relevant to all members of the nursing team.



Scan the QR code to access the full resource on the RCN website.

This pocket guide is a condensed version of the online RCN Accountability and Delegation resource.

References are shown on the RCN online resource.

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Accountability: You and the law

All members of the nursing team are personally accountable for their actions to their service users, colleagues, regulatory body, employer and the law. There are three main considerations: organisational, team and personal accountability.

Accountability in terms of the NMC Code (2018), means being held to account for your actions and being able to explain how you used your professional judgement to make decisions, including decisions to delegate aspects of care. Under the Code you remain accountable for the decisions made by the people you delegate to.

Delegation

Delegation is the process by which the delegator allocates clinical or non-clinical treatment of care to a competent person. The delegator is accountable for the decision to delegate and remains accountable for the delegated task.

Registered nurses are responsible for managing the nursing care and are accountable for the appropriate delegation and supervision of care provided by others in the team.

The NMC Code (2018) gives clear expectations for individuals on the NMC register when they delegate to others. The NMC Code states under Practise effectively at section 11:

Be accountable for your decisions to delegate tasks and duties to other people.

To achieve this, you must:

- 11.1 Only delegate tasks and duties that are within the other person's scope of competence, making sure that they fully understand your instructions.
- 11.2 Make sure that everyone you delegate tasks to is adequately supervised and supported so they can provide safe and compassionate care.
- 11.3 Confirm that the outcome of any task you have delegated to someone else meets the required standard.

Principles of delegation

Points to consider when delegating

- Delegation must always be in the best interests of the service user and not performed simply to save time or money.
- Anyone you delegate to must have been suitably trained to perform the intervention.
- Full records of training given, including dates, should be kept.
- Evidence that anyone you delegate to is competent and has been assessed. This should be recorded, preferably against recognised standards.
- The role should be within their job description.

- All team members need to be informed that the activity has been delegated.
- The person who delegates the activity must ensure that an appropriate level of supervision is available and that anyone you delegate to has the opportunity for mentorship.
- The level of supervision and feedback required depends on the recorded knowledge and competence, the needs of the service user, setting and the activities assigned.
- Anyone you delegate to must have ongoing development to make sure their competency is maintained.

- The whole process must be assessed to identify any risks.
- Ongoing monitoring and escalation plans as required.
- Commissioning considerations may also need to be taken into account when delegating.
- Delegation must consider the context of every situation rather than focusing on the task alone.
- There should be clear guidelines and protocols in place so that the support worker is not required to make a standalone clinical judgement.

Points to check when delegating

- Is delegation in the best interests of the service user?
- Are there clear guidelines and protocols in place?
- Have you considered the clinical risk involved in delegating?
- Do you have authority to delegate the work and the appropriate clinical knowledge?
- Does your colleague have the skills and knowledge required to undertake the task, including communication and interpersonal skills, as well as clinical competence?

- Does your colleague have the capacity to take on additional work?
- Can you provide support and supervision and check that the outcome of the delegation meets the required standard?

Checklist to determine whether to accept delegation

- Has the degree of risk been considered?
- Are you sure that the activity is not too complex for you to accept?
- Would you be compromising the service user's care by accepting it?

- Does the person delegating have the authority to delegate the work?
- Are you confident that they hold the appropriate clinical knowledge to delegate the activity to you?
- Do you have the skills and knowledge required to undertake the task?
- Are you confident about the communication and interpersonal skills required as well as your clinical competence?
- Are you sure that accepting the work will not impact on your performance?

- Do you have the capacity to take on the delegated task?
- Do you understand what is being asked of you?

Have you answered yes to all of these questions? If yes, you can accept the delegated activity. If not, say no.

After accepting the delegated work:

Delegation must be safe and its aim must be to improve the care of all service users within any given setting.

- Keep your skills and knowledge up to date. Request regular updates with your supervisor.

- Work within guidelines: there must be clear and robust protocols in place and these must be reviewed frequently.
- Regularly check that your job description is accurate and up to date, reflecting the new roles and responsibilities.
- Do you know what to do if you have any concerns? There must be adequate supervision and access to support when required. You have a duty to let your colleagues know and not to undertake any activities that you do not feel are appropriate at that time.



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