

The Principles of Nursing Practice

The Principles of Nursing Practice tell us what patients, colleagues, families and carers can expect from nursing.

Nursing is provided by nursing staff, including ward managers (in hospitals) or team leaders (in the community), specialist nurses, community nurses, health visitors, healthcare assistants or student nurses.

A Nurses and nursing staff treat everyone in their care with dignity and humanity – they understand their individual needs, show compassion and sensitivity, and provide care in a way that respects all people equally.

B Nurses and nursing staff take responsibility for the care they provide and answer for their own judgements and actions – they carry out these actions in a way that is agreed with their patients, and the families and carers of their patients, and in a way that meets the requirements of their professional bodies and the law.

C Nurses and nursing staff manage risk, are vigilant about risk, and help to keep everyone safe in the places they receive health care.

D Nurses and nursing staff provide and promote care that puts people at the centre, involves patients, service users, their families and their carers in decisions and helps them make informed choices about their treatment and care.

E Nurses and nursing staff are at the heart of the communication process: they assess, record and report on treatment and care, handle information sensitively and confidentially, deal with complaints effectively, and are conscientious in reporting the things they are concerned about.

F Nurses and nursing staff have up-to-date knowledge and skills, and use these with intelligence, insight and understanding in line with the needs of each individual in their care.

G Nurses and nursing staff work closely with their own team and with other professionals, making sure patients' care and treatment is co-ordinated, is of a high standard and has the best possible outcome.

H Nurses and nursing staff lead by example, develop themselves and other staff, and influence the way care is given in a manner that is open and responds to individual needs.

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What are the eight Principles?

The eight Principles describe what the public can expect from nursing practice in any setting. They have been produced jointly between nurses and patient groups.

Why do we need them?

The Principles were drawn up as there was no comparable publication that explained what nurses and nursing staff do.

How were the eight Principles put together?

The Royal College of Nursing undertook some research that identified the values common to all nursing tasks and organised them for review by nurses and patient advocate groups. The RCN then developed the statements from the themes agreed by these groups. The Principles have been developed to be succinct, meaningful and easy to understand by all, resulting in them being endorsed by the Plain English Campaign.

Who put them together?

The Principles were developed by the RCN in partnership with the Department of Health (England), the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and other patient and service user organisations.

What can they be used for?

The Principles can be used in conjunction with measurement tools for the purposes of quality improvement. The RCN has developed an online resource accompanying the Principles, which includes further information about how they relate to other quality improvement initiatives. It provides a selection of examples that give an indication of the types of measurement that might be used to determine how effective each Principle is within a given context, and stories illustrating how the Principles are applied in real life situations.

The Principles can also be used by nursing teams for continuing professional development, as well as for sharing with patients and carers. They enable providers and patients to know what quality nursing looks like.

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*Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark only applies to the pop-out card.