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The Nova Scotia College of Nursing is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants.

What is the difference between medical cannabis and recreational cannabis?

Medical cannabis is generally used to alleviate symptoms of a disease or disorder. Medical cannabis is authorized by a prescriber who provides a Health Canada Medical Document or similar form¹. This enables individuals to obtain the cannabis from a licensed producer, apply to Health Canada to grow their own, designating someone to produce it for them or if over the age of 19 obtaining at the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission (in person or online). In Nova Scotia, nurse practitioners and physicians are authorized to issue the medical document. For further information on medical cannabis please see [Health Canada website](#).

Recreational cannabis is often used for its euphoric effects. On October 17, 2018 the federal [Cannabis Act](#) and the [Cannabis Regulations](#) as well as the provincial [Cannabis Control Act](#) were enacted, making the use of recreational cannabis legal in Canada.

How did legislation change access to cannabis in Canada?

The new *Cannabis Act* and *Regulations* establish rules relating to the purchase, possession, sale, distribution, consumption, cultivation, propagation and harvesting of cannabis for both recreational and medical purposes.

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 is 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

What should I do if I overhear my colleague say they consumed cannabis before working? 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 Practice². In order for nurses to respond appropriately when they suspect impairment in

1 For NPs, the activity of providing a medical document to authorize medical cannabis is referred to as prescribing (New Classes of Practitioners Regulations-s.3(2)(a))

2 Standard of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada Standard 1 Professional Accountability and Responsibility, Standards of

a co-worker, they need to be able to recognize possible signs and symptoms. The first step is to verify if the information is factual and accurate. If you suspect a colleague is impaired, ensuring client safety is the first priority.

If the nurse is impaired, 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, your supervisor, or your manager 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](#)
- [Impairment: Cannabis in the Workplace Handout](#) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety)
- [Problematic Substance Use in the Workplace: Practice Guideline](#)

One of my nurse colleagues posted pictures on their public social media account of them partying (drinking alcohol and using 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
- Social Media Guidelines for RNs and NPs

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/policies 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.

For further information on anything contained within this resource, please contact a NSCN practice consultant at practice@nscn.ca.