Queen’s University School of Nursing Professional Behaviour Policy

# 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide nursing students in all programs within the School of Nursing at Queen’s University with specific direction concerning professional behaviour. Responsibilities of the student, as outlined in this document, are a part of the professional requirements of the Nursing Program and evaluation of professional behaviour is an ongoing and integral part of the curriculum.

Consequently, evaluation of professional behaviour can affect both grading and a student’s status within the program. Professionalism is reflected in each student’s conduct and is essential for the development of professionalism, collegiality, collaboration, and the desire to learn.

A profession is defined as follows: “An occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills. It is a vocation in which knowledge of some department of science or learning or the practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others. Its members are governed by codes of ethics and profess a commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their domain. These commitments form the basis of a social contract between a profession and society, which in return grants the profession a monopoly over the use of its knowledge base, the right to considerable autonomy in practice and the privilege of self-regulation. Professions and their members are accountable to those served and to society.” [Cruess, Johnston and Cruess, 2004]

The Queen’s University School of Nursing has an obligation to patients/clients, students, the healthcare community and society at large to educate students on their professional obligations. In fulfilling this mandate, procedures must be in place to recognize exemplary examples of student professional behaviour. Similarly, when students fall short of professional behaviour expectations, the School must make them aware of improper conduct and undertake necessary remediation in order to ensure that negative patterns of behaviour are replaced by positive ones.

# The objectives of this policy are to:

* + 1. demonstrate the priority placed by the School on professional behaviour;
    2. identify lapses in professional behaviour as early as possible and provide appropriate remediation;
    3. identify exemplary professional behaviour so that it may be a) recognized, and b) used as a potential vehicle for peer-modelling;
    4. provide students, faculty and staff with a clear articulation of expectations vis à vis student professional behaviour;
    5. provide the School with clearly articulated authority to act when dealing with lapses in professional behaviour;
    6. identify procedures for managing student professional behaviour issues; and,
    7. provide a longitudinal approach (i.e. not course-by-course or year-by-year) to monitoring students’ behaviour.

# Scope

This policy applies to the following contexts:

* + 1. all classroom-based milieu;
    2. all clinical settings that are part of the learning program; and,
    3. other situations/contexts where professional behaviour is expected (e.g. social events, social media).

# Professional Behaviour Expectations Students will:

* + - treat all classmates, faculty, staff, patients/clients and health care team members with respect and consideration, without regard to gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation;
    - adhere to the highest standard of integrity and honesty in all professional relationships;
    - protect patient/client/peer/staff/faculty confidentiality;
    - show respect in all oral, written and electronic communications (e.g. e-mail, social networking sites, blogs, Facebook, instant messaging);
    - remain calm, courteous and mature in the face of adversity and/or conflict;
    - avoid inappropriate behaviour (e.g. swearing, gossiping and negatively criticizing others);
    - be accountable for actions;
    - communicate title and credentials accurately;
    - recognize and respond appropriately to others’ unprofessional behaviour;
    - notify appropriate personnel if ill, or otherwise unable to perform clinical or academic duties;
    - appreciate the significance of own health and implications for patient care;
    - obtain permission before recording any interaction with professors, staff and other students (e.g. if you wish to tape a lecture or meeting);
    - discuss questions or concerns with the individual involved first, before going to a higher level (e.g. speak with course professor before involving the Undergraduate or Graduate Coordinator).

# Evaluation

The goal is to ensure professionalism in all students, reward the best professional behaviour, identify the few students who show deficiencies in professional behaviour, and dismiss the rare student who cannot practice professionally. This will be achieved by:

* + - Ensuring all students are familiar with the Professional Behaviour Policy and the requirement to adhere to its principles.
    - Ensuring all staff, faculty and preceptors, working with students are familiar with the Professional Behaviour Policy and directing them to note any behaviour that they view as either exemplary or contrary to its principles.
    - Ensuring all students are aware that unprofessional behaviour may have consequences.

# Responses to Exemplary Behaviour

Examples of exemplary professional behaviour will be defined as follows:

Situations in which a student exhibits an exceptional commitment to the principles of professionalism that is recognized by peers, volunteers/mentors, clients, instructors/preceptors, healthcare team members or members of the wider University community.

In response to exemplary behaviour, the student’s conduct may be recorded in their file, and this can be used for reference purposes.

# Responses to Conduct Violations

Lapses in professional behaviour are viewed first and foremost as an opportunity for education, raising awareness and remediation. The intent is to provide opportunities for students to become conscious of their unprofessional behaviours and learn how to alter their behaviour accordingly. Whenever possible, consequences should reflect this belief.

# Consequences will vary in severity based on the following factors:

* + - classification of the severity of the lapse;
    - whether the student has had previous lapses;
    - level of responsibility shown by the student; and,
    - extenuating circumstances.

# Consequences may include though not be limited to:

* + - research and reflection resulting in a written submission;
    - issuance of apology;
    - counselling;
    - mandated meetings with a mentor; and/or
    - suspension or expulsion from the School of Nursing at Queen’s University.

# Minor, major and critical lapses will be defined and responded to as follows:

**Minor lapses** – These are errors that have minimal consequences. Often there is no awareness of the unprofessional act, or the student realizes the error after the fact. There may be mitigating circumstances.

# Examples:

1. student does not meet deadlines and fails to notify anyone;
2. student is overheard voicing frustration about a peer, client or instructor;
3. student participates in voicing frustration about a peer, client or instructor on social media;
4. student uses his or her computer for purposes other than learning in the classroom environment; and/or,
5. student has a habit of being late for class and disrupting the classroom environment. Consequences for minor lapses in professionalism:
6. the incident may be resolved with a discussion between the appropriate faculty member or supervisor and the student;
7. the student’s conduct may be recorded in his/her file; and/or,
8. the student may lose privileges related to his/her conduct violation, such as choice of clinical placement, computer use in class or volunteer opportunities.

**Major lapses** – Major lapses have potentially serious consequences. Often the student has awareness of the unprofessional act. Usually, there are no mitigating circumstances.

# Examples:

1. student continually fails to return phone calls and/or emails from an instructor as requested within the requested timeframe;
2. student posts volunteer/client/peer/faculty information that does not belong in the public domain on a social networking website; and/or,
3. student has a pattern of unexcused absences in academic or clinical courses. Consequences for major lapses in professionalism:
4. the student’s conduct is documented in his/her file;
5. the student may be required to complete remedial course work;
6. the student may be required to apologize for his/her actions to the parties involved;
7. the student may be suspended or expelled from the professional program.

**Critical lapses** – Critical lapses have direct harmful consequences or are clear breaches of well recognized standards. They are serious errors that will require immediate action by a faculty member, preceptor or Coordinator of the program. They are a clear violation of the professional code of conduct.

# Examples:

1. student being dishonest either by lying or misrepresenting himself/herself;
2. student is verbally abusive to a volunteer/mentor, client, peer, faculty member or preceptor;
3. student is sexually inappropriate with a client, other member of the health care team or their peers; and/or,
4. student violates the confidentiality of a client, volunteer/mentor or peer. Consequences for critical lapses in professionalism:
5. the student’s conduct is documented in his/her file;
6. the student’s conduct may be addressed through the Queen’s Academic Integrity policy;
7. the student may be required to apologize for his/her actions to the parties involved;
8. the student may be required to repeat a course; and/or
9. the student may be expelled from the professional program.

# Procedures

* + 1. Lapses in professional behaviour may be identified by any number of individuals, including but not limited to, the Associate Directors, course-coordinators, clinical instructors, preceptors, students, staff or community members.
    2. A summary of the lapse is communicated to the Associate Director.
    3. The student is advised that the incident has been noted and is given a chance to respond.
    4. The incident is reviewed by the Associate Director. The incident is classified as minor, major, or critical. In cases where the lapse is deemed to be major or critical, the Director of the School of Nursing will be notified.
    5. With major and critical incidents, an ad hoc Professional Behaviour Committee will be struck. The committee will include the Associate Director, two faculty members, one student member, and a faculty member from another professional school.
    6. The Professional Behaviour Committee will determine the appropriate consequences and remediation plan.
    7. The student will be notified in writing of the decision.
    8. Student may appeal the decision to the Chair of the Undergraduate Academic Progress and Graduation Committee within two weeks of receipt of the letter. A graduate student may appeal to the Graduate Program Committee.
    9. All documentation related to the incident and response will be included in the students’ file
    10. Program Coordinators will present a brief summary of all cases at the annual faculty meeting.

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