

Policy: Fitness to Practice

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to guide students of the NESA BN Programs, as developing professionals:

- to understand what fitness to practice means and its relevance to their practice as students,
- to be aware of the resources available to maintain their fitness to practice, and
- to be aware of the process and need to initiate a fitness to practice occupational health assessment if their fitness to practice is compromised.

DEFINITIONS:

Fitness to Practice (FTP): “all the qualities and capabilities of an individual relevant to their practice as a nurse, including but not limited to freedom from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional condition and dependence on alcohol or drugs that impairs their ability to practise nursing” (CNA, 2017, p. 22). This means that the person must be capable of safe and effective practice. However, it does NOT mean that a person must be free of any or all health conditions, concerns, or disabilities (MaLaren, Haycock-Stuart, McLachlan, & James, 2016).

FTP Occupational Health Assessment (FTP-OHA): an assessment undertaken by a qualified, regulated health care professional to determine the presence of any limitations or restrictions to practice, as well as the need for any practice accommodations, based on the specific FTP concern. The FTP assessment will also consider any occupational health requirements, the specific characteristics of the practice environment, the safety of all individuals in the practice setting, and the academic requirements of the placement (Alberta Health Services, 2015).

Accommodation: “means making changes to certain rules, standards, policies, workplace cultures and physical environments to ensure that they don’t have a negative effect on a person because of the person’s mental or physical disability, religion, gender or any other protected ground” (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2010). This may include modifications to student duties and activities in order to allow a person to participate meaningfully in a practice placement.

Duty to accommodate: the legal duty of employers, business owners, public service providers, educational institutions, professional associations and so on to accommodate a person’s needs, unless such accommodations will cause undue hardship, based on legally protected grounds according to federal and provincial human rights law and legislation (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2010). For a

list of legally protected grounds, see

https://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/sheets/history_and_info/Pages/protected_areas_grounds.aspx.

Undue hardship: the excessive or onerous conditions placed on an organization's operations as a result of an accommodation (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2010). Undue hardship is determined by reviewing the costs involved in providing the accommodation, the feasibility of the accommodation for both the educational institution and the practice site, the degree of disruption to normal operations, and whether substantial interference with the rights of other employees or students will result from making the accommodation. Also included are workforce and facility factors, as well as health and safety concerns.

Self-care: The practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own health and well-being, particularly during periods of stress (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2018).

POLICY SCOPE:

This policy applies to all students in the NESAs BN Programs engaged in teaching and learning activities *in any and all practice environments*.

POLICY STATEMENT(S):

1. Nursing is a highly trusted, self-regulated profession. Regulation of the profession places the public safety and interest at the forefront.
2. The safety of patients, clients, families, students, faculty members, instructors and staff members in practice sites is of paramount importance. Ensuring student FTP is crucial to providing safe and competent nursing care.
3. All nurses (including student nurses) are responsible and accountable to maintain and ensure their own fitness to practice. If aware that they do not have the necessary physical, mental, or emotional capacity to practice safely and competently, nurses have the responsibility and ethical duty to withdraw from the provision of care and to take the necessary steps to regain their fitness to practice (CNA, 2017).
4. It is the expectation that all students will ensure their own FTP before participating *in any and all practice environments*.
5. As students are still learning and developing as emerging professionals, faculty members and/or practice instructors may need to assist students in recognizing, reporting, and addressing their fitness to practice issues or concerns. This requires careful, context-sensitive judgment and fairness when helping students be accountable to FTP requirements.

6. The processes for assessing and communicating FTP issues or concerns are time consuming and can be anxiety provoking for students (MacLaren et al., 2016). It is important that these processes be timely, collaborative, cooperative, collegial, and supportive.
7. The NESAs BN Programs accept the responsibility to take all reasonable steps to accommodate student learning in the practice setting, in partnership with the practice site, according to the following principles:
 - a. Accommodations must reasonably ensure the safety of patient/client, the student, and all others in the practice setting.
 - b. The requested accommodation must be acceptable to the practice site.
 - c. The NESAs BN Programs will be unable to provide accommodations that cause undue hardship to either the educational institution or the practice site.
8. Practice accommodations are intended to support the academic and performance capabilities of the student and remove barriers to the student's success. However, practice accommodations do not require the NESAs BN Programs to lower their performance standards and expectations, nor does it relieve the student of the responsibility to develop the essential competencies and skills required to be successful.

SPECIFICS OF THE POLICY:

1. Students are expected to take the necessary steps to maintain their own FTP. This may include eating a proper diet, exercising regularly, ensuring adequate rest and sleep, and stress management, among others. Numerous resources are available on both campuses to assist students in developing appropriate and effective self-care strategies to maintain their own FTP. For more information, follow the links found on these webpages:
 - a. University of Lethbridge (UL) Services for Students – <https://www.uleth.ca/services-for-students>
 - b. Lethbridge College (LC) Current Students – <https://lethbridgecollege.ca/current-students>
2. Students are expected to develop the professional habits of regular self-reflection and self-assessment. These habits will enable students to anticipate circumstances or conditions that may jeopardize their FTP and take proactive steps to prevent FTP issues or concerns.
3. A FTP issue or concern may be identified by any one of the following:
 - a. Self-identified
 - b. Identified by theory or practice instructor
 - c. Identified by peer or colleague
 - d. Identified by someone else (Ex: healthcare provider, employer, etc.)
4. When an actual or potential FTP issue or concern about a student is identified, the NESAs Practice Coordinator at LC (PC-LC), or the NESAs Program Coordinator at UL (PC-UL), as appropriate, must be notified as soon as possible. It is the role of the PC-LC or PC-UL to guide the student through the approved NESAs process of assessing and navigating the FTP issue or concern.

5. Once the student has met with the PC-LC or PC-UL, a FTP-OHA will be initiated if indicated. The FTP-OHA process can take time. While this process is in progress, the student will not be allowed to return to the practice site. Therefore, it is critical to notify the PC-LC or PC-UL right away, so that the assessment process can be initiated quickly and the student can return to the practice area as soon as possible. Practice time lost during the FTP process will be counted as absences and may impact a student's ability to successfully complete a practice course.
6. Once a FTP-OHA has been completed, the PC-LC or PC-UL will review the results of the assessment and determine the next steps. The assessment will determine if any restrictions or limitations apply to the student's practice, and the duration of those restrictions or limitations. The assessment will also specify what, if any, accommodations are required. These accommodations will be evaluated by the PC-LC or PC-UL, in collaboration with the practice site representative, for feasibility. The NESAs BN Programs will make all reasonable efforts to fulfill their duty to accommodate.
7. If, in consultation with the practice instructor, it is determined that the restrictions or limitations imposed by the FTP-OHA will prevent the student from meeting the learning outcomes of the practice course, the student may be required to withdraw from the practice course. Similarly, if implementation of the recommended accommodations is not feasible, the student may be required to withdraw from the practice course.

APPENDIX:

N/A

RELATED POLICIES/ASSOCIATED GUIDELINES:

NESA BN Programs Policy: Professional Conduct

Lethbridge College Policy: Occupational Health and Safety Policy

Lethbridge College Policy: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy

University of Lethbridge Policy: Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy

University of Lethbridge Policy: Assessment of Student Learning Policy and Procedures (Undergraduate Students)

University of Lethbridge Policy: Harassment and Discrimination Policy

REFERENCES:

Alberta Health Services. (2015). *Fitness to practice: Student placements*. Practice Support Document

(Guideline) # 1165: Alberta Health Services.

Alberta Human Rights Commission. (2010). *Duty to accommodate: Interpretive bulletin*. Edmonton, AB:

Alberta Human Rights Commission. Retrieved March 11, 2019, from

https://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/Documents/Bull_DutytoAccom_web.pdf

CNA. (2017). *Code of ethics for registered nurses*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Nurses Association. Retrieved

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MacLaren, J., Haycock-Stuart, E., McLachlan, A., & James, C. (2016). Understanding pre-registration nursing fitness to practise processes. *Nurse Education Today*, 36, 412-418.

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NOTE: NESAs Policies exist within organizational frameworks of policy for Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge, and within agreements established with practice partner organizations. If and when NESAs policies are found to differ from such policies and agreements, it is important to note that such policies/agreements will take precedence over NESAs guidelines or policies.

Revised By/date:	Approved by/date:
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