KENTUCKY BOARD OF NURSING
312 Whittington Parkway, Suite 300
Louisville, Kentucky 40222-5172
http://kbn.ky.gov

ADVISORY OPINION STATEMENT

ROLES OF NURSES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF "PRN" MEDICATION AND PLACEBOS

The Kentucky Board of Nursing has received multiple inquiries regarding the roles of nurses in the administration of medication on a "prn" (pro re nata--as circumstances may require) basis, adjustment of dosage amounts, and administration of placebos. After study of the statutes governing nursing practice and the various questions posed in the inquiries, the Kentucky Board of Nursing issued opinions as contained herein.

Accountability and Responsibility of Nurses

KRS 314.021(2) holds nurses individually responsible and accountable for rendering safe, effective nursing care to clients and for judgments exercised and actions taken in the course of providing care.

KRS 314.021(2) imposes individual responsibility upon nurses. Acts which are within the permissible scope of practice for a given licensure level may be performed only by those licensees who personally possess the education and skill proficiency to perform those acts in a safe, effective manner.

Nursing practice should be consistent with the *Kentucky Nursing Laws*, established standards of practice, and be evidence based.

Statutes

KRS 314.021(2) states that:

> All individuals licensed under provisions of this chapter shall be responsible and accountable for making decisions that are based upon the individuals' educational preparation and experience in nursing.

KRS 314.011(6) defines "registered nursing practice" as:

> ...The performance of acts requiring substantial specialized knowledge, judgment, and nursing skill based upon the principles of psychological, biological, physical, and social sciences in the application of the nursing process in:
>
> a) The care, counsel, and health teaching of the ill, injured or infirm;
>
> b) The maintenance of health or prevention of illness of others;
>
> c) The administration of medication and treatment as prescribed by physician, physician assistant, dentist, or advanced practice registered nurse and as further authorized or limited by the board, and which are consistent either with American Nurses' Association Standards of Practice or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of registered nurses. Components of medication administration include, but are not limited to:

1. Preparing and giving medication in the prescribed dosage, route, and frequency;
2. Observing, recording, and reporting desired effects, untoward reactions, and side effects of drug therapy;
3. Intervening when emergency care is required as a result of drug therapy;
4. Recognizing accepted prescribing limits and reporting deviations to the prescribing individual;
5. Recognizing drug incompatibilities and reporting interactions or potential interactions to the prescribing individual; and
6. Instructing an individual regarding medications.

d) The supervision, teaching of, and delegation to other personnel in the performance of activities relating to nursing care.

e) The performance of other nursing acts which are authorized or limited by the board, and which are consistent either with American Nurses' Association Standards of Practice or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of registered nurses.

KRS 314.011(10) defines "licensed practical nursing practice" as:

...The performance of acts requiring knowledge and skill such as are taught or acquired in approved schools for practical nursing in:

a) The observing and caring for the ill, injured, or infirm under the direction of a registered nurse, a licensed physician, or dentist;

b) The giving of counsel and applying procedures to safeguard life and health, as defined and authorized by the board;

c) The administration of medication or treatment as authorized by a physician, physician assistant, dentist, or advanced practice registered nurse and as further authorized or limited by the board which is consistent with the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of licensed practical nurses;

d) Teaching, supervising, and delegating except as limited by the board;

e) The performance of other nursing acts which are authorized or limited by the board and which are consistent with the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses' Standards of Practice or with Standards of Practice established by nationally accepted organizations of licensed practical nurses.

Advisory Opinions

Nurses are responsible and accountable for their decisions regarding the administration of medication based upon their educational preparation and experience in nursing.

It is the opinion of the Board that:

1. In the administration of medication, nurses should follow written approved policies and procedures of the health care facility/agency that are consistent with KRS Chapter 314. Such policies and procedures should assure safe and accurate administration of all medication, including "prn" medication.

2. The administration of medication on a "prn" basis is within the scope of nursing practice. based upon the prescription/order for a "prn" medication and the patient's plan of care, the registered nurse, or the licensed practical nurse under the direction of a registered nurse, may make decisions including, but not limited to, the following:

   a) Determining the appropriate time for the administration of the medication;
   b) Choosing from two or more appropriate "prn" medications;
   c) Omitting one or more "prn" medications.

A nurse is obligated not to change an order of the prescriber without first obtaining the consent of the prescriber to do so. The nurse, who has made the determination that the ordered dosage of medication is inappropriate for the patient, must contact the prescriber for a change in the dosage prior to administering the drug. For example, if a registered nurse, after completing an assessment of the patient, determines that the dosage of medication is too high, the nurse may not administer a lesser amount without first consulting the prescriber.

When an order/prescription for medication contains a minimum and maximum dosage range (i.e., Demerol, 50-75 mg., IM, q 3-4 hours, prn for pain), the registered nurse, or the licensed practical nurse under the direction of a registered nurse, may determine which dosage to administer.

These decisions, and others, must be based upon a knowledge of the specific drug; knowledge of the patient's condition and established plan of care; and continuing nursing assessment, observation and documentation of the patient's response(s). Nursing assessment data must be individualized according to the specific drug administered and the needs of the patient.

Administration of Placebos

It is the opinion of the Board that:

1. The administration of a "placebo" is appropriate for use in a clinical trial or clinical research setting provided the individuals receiving the placebo have given informed consent;
2. Nurses who administer placebos in clinical research settings should do so according to written, approved institutional policies and procedures;
3. It is not within the scope of nursing practice for a nurse to independently administer a placebo;
4. Nurses should not administer placebos even if there is a medical order to do so other than in clinical research settings or clinical trials. The nurse would subsequently notify the prescriber that the placebo has not been given.

Determining Scope of Practice

KRS 314.021(2) holds all nurses individually responsible and accountable for the individual's acts based upon the nurse's education and experience. Each nurse must exercise professional and prudent judgment in determining whether the performance of a given act is within the scope of practice for which the nurse is both licensed and clinically competent to perform. In addition to this advisory opinion statement, the Kentucky Board of Nursing has published "Scope of Practice Determination Guidelines" which contains a decision tree chart providing guidance to nurses in determining whether a selected act is within an individual nurse's scope of practice now or in the future. A copy of the guidelines may be downloaded from the KBN website at http:/kbn/ky/gov.

The Kentucky Board of Nursing issues advisory opinions as to what constitutes safe nursing practice. An opinion is not a regulation of the Board and does not have the force and effect of law. It is issued as a guideline to licensees who wish to engage in safe nursing practice.

Approved: 6/87
Revised: 12/87; 2/92; 1/93; 6/01; 2/02; 2/05
Reviewed: 6/2010
Editorial revision: 1/2011; 5/2012