

VERMONT STATE BOARD OF NURSING

ABANDONMENT POSITION STATEMENT

Question: Under what conditions does patient abandonment occur?

Definitions:

Nurse-Patient Relationship (or Caregiver-Patient Relationship)

A relationship that begins when an APRN, RN, LPN or LNA accepts responsibility for the care of a patient

Patient Abandonment

Disengaging from the nurse-patient or caregiver-patient relationship without properly notifying appropriate personnel (supervisor or employer) and/or making reasonable arrangements for continuation of care.

Employment Abandonment

Severing the terms of a contract with an employer. Note: The Board has no jurisdiction in this area.

Background:

The nurse or caregiver-patient relationship is grounded in the patient's trust that the APRN/RN/LPN/LNA will act to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the patient. Patients are dependent and vulnerable due to illness, injury, disability, and immobility. Patient abandonment may place the patient at risk for harm.

Although the Administrative Rules of the State Board of Nursing do not define abandonment, they do include, as an example of unprofessional conduct, "leaving a nursing assignment without properly advising appropriate personnel" (Chapter 4, Subchapter 4, II, D,6.

Clear communication between staff and supervisors is essential to arrive at solutions that best meet patient care needs without compromising either patient safety or a nurse's license.

Position Statement which Reflects Nurse's Roles and Responsibilities:

For abandonment to occur the licensee must have first accepted a patient assignment, thus establishing a nurse or caregiver-patient relationship. The establishment of this relationship occurs when the licensee accepts a patient assignment, or otherwise assumes responsibility for the care of a patient. Before disengaging from the relationship or before becoming unavailable for patient care before the end of the scheduled work shift, the APRN/RN/LPN/LNA must notify appropriate personnel (supervisor or employer) and/or transfer responsibility for patient care to another qualified person. For an APRN this involves transferring client records as well.

The following circumstances do NOT constitute patient abandonment (but may be considered employment abandonment by the employer):

- The licensee does not report for employment and does not assume an assignment.
- The licensee leaves the assignment after notifying the appropriate personnel as defined above.

- The licensee refuses to accept an assignment to a unit when there has been no orientation and no educational preparation or where the work would be outside their scope of practice. (See Determining Scope of Practice Position Statement)
- The licensee refuses to work beyond his/her scheduled shift.
- The licensee resigns without giving specific notice.

References/Citations:

Vermont Board of Nursing - Administrative Rules – Chapter 4 Nursing - Subchapter 4 Discipline
Vermont Position Statement – Determining Scope of Practice and Decision Tree - 2009
Maryland Board of Nursing Position Statement - Abandonment
Mississippi Board of Nursing Position Statement - Patient Abandonment
New Jersey Board of Nursing - Patient Abandonment Position Statement
Oregon Board of Nursing Policy - Patient Abandonment
South Carolina Board of Nursing Position Statement - Patient Abandonment
Tennessee Board of Nursing Position Statement - Patient Abandonment
Texas Board of Nursing Rules – Patient Abandonment
Washington Board of Nursing Position Statement - Patient Abandonment Defined

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This opinion is subject to change as changes in nursing practice occur.