

VERMONT STATE BOARD OF NURSING

THE ROLE OF LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES IN TRIAGE POSITION STATEMENT

The Board received a request for a position statement on Telephone Triage in the physician's office.

The Board's interpretation of the question is:

"May LPN's or unlicensed personnel use physician-approved protocols to determine if patients need emergency treatment or offer other options over the telephone?"

Facts considered:

Definition of LPN Practice: - Title 26 V.S.A. Chapter 28, Subchapter 1 1572, 3, A-F.

(3) "Licensed practical nursing" means a directed scope of nursing practice which includes, but is not limited to:

- A. Contributing to the assessment of the health status of individuals and groups.
- B. Participating in the development and modification of the strategy of care.
- C. Implementing the appropriate aspects of the strategy of care as defined by the Board.
- D. Maintaining safe and effective nursing care rendered directly or indirectly.
- E. Participating in the evaluation of responses to interventions.
- F. Delegating nursing interventions that may be performed by others and that do not conflict with this chapter.

A licensed practical nurse functions at the direction of a registered nurse, advanced practice registered nurse, licensed physician or licensed dentist in the performance of activities delegated by that health care professional.

Definition of Triage:

a process in which a group of patients are sorted according to their need of care (Mosby's 5th)

Definition of Telephone Triage:

"a process of collecting information over the telephone to determine the urgency of a health problem and to determine whether medical interventions is needed and how soon treatment should begin" (Simonsen)

Triage ensures that clients receive immediate attention in emergencies. Research supports the use of experienced nurses with expert assessment skills and strong communication and interviewing skills in making decisions regarding prioritizing care (Polaski & Tatro).

The establishment of algorithms by physicians serves as guides for making an assessment and reaching a decision for a plan of care.

Scheduling of appointments and other non-health related calls for information do not constitute triage.

POSITION STATEMENT

Telephone triage requires assessment, decision making, and skills that may be guided by approved algorithms or health assessment guidelines. Contribution to the assessment of the health status of individuals is part of the definition of LPN practice (Title 26 3(A)).

Based upon these assumptions it is the Board's opinion that telephone triage/assessment is within the scope of practice of an RN/APRN.

LPN's may collect data and ask questions that are delineated in an algorithm to assist the physician, RN or APRN in making an assessment of a client's condition.

References:

Polaski, AL & Tatro, SE (eds) (1996) Luckman's Core Principles and Practices of Medical Surgical Nursing.

Mosby's Medical, Nursing and Allied Health Dictionary - 5th Edition (1998).

Simonsen, Sandra (1996) Telephone Health Assessment Guidelines for Practice.

Smith, Kelly (1999) Pediatric Nursing July/Aug Vol. 25/ No. 4

This Position Statement represents the Board's current thinking. Position statements are not legally binding.

Approved: February 2000