



# Professional Expectations of RPNs During COVID-19

*Updated October 2021*

The COVID-19 pandemic has put unprecedented strain on our health system, and Registered Psychiatric Nurses have been at the forefront of that response for 18 months. Public health measures continue to be required to mitigate the spread and impacts of the virus.

It is essential that all RPNs understand that it is their professional responsibility to follow the public health orders and to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates their professional commitment to the prevention of illness and the promotion and maintenance of optimal health, rehabilitation and recovery.

When following the public health orders, RPNs are expected to:

- Demonstrate professionalism, leadership, critical thinking and professional judgment
- Incorporate evidence-informed knowledge into their practice
- Uphold and follow the policies of their employer(s). Where RPNs feel that employer policies contradict that of the *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* or the *CRPNM Code of Ethics*, RPNs are encouraged to contact the CRPNM practice consultant.

With respect to the requirement to be vaccinated, or tested, RPNs are expected to follow public health order(s) and their employer policies.

With respect to requests to disclose vaccination status by clients, RPNs are expected to use professional judgment and critical thinking to uphold the standards of psychiatric nursing practice and the concepts of:

- informed consent
- the therapeutic use of self
- establishing and negotiating therapeutic boundaries
- developing partnerships
- application of evidence-informed knowledge
- integrating infection prevention and control principles, and
- recognizing and addressing potential risks and hazards to promote a safe environment

We recognize that some RPNs may choose not to disclose their personal health information. In these instances, it is important to reflect on the therapeutic relationship and why this information might be important for the client. RPNs are encouraged to refer the client another to another health professional if the non-disclosure will be a barrier to the therapeutic relationship.

### **Personal values clarification and COVID-19**

It is important for RPNs to reflect on their duty to provide care as it relates to COVID-19 and the public health orders. Duty to provide care involves recognizing one's own personal values and beliefs about the pandemic, vaccinations and client care situations and taking measures to avoid any negative impact on client care, psychiatric nursing practice and the practice environment.

RPNs are skilled in dealing with sensitive issues. Individuals, families, groups and communities seek out the knowledge, skills and expertise of the RPN when they are vulnerable. As with any professional relationship there is an inherent power imbalance. The psychiatric nurse's power arises from the client's trust and vulnerability. RPNs need to be aware of their personal biases and opinions with respect to the public health orders and vaccinations as their own opinions can inadvertently affect a client's decision making.

RPNs recognize that informed clients have the right to be independent, live at risk and direct their own care. The duty to provide care also means that the RPN will not compromise or withdraw care if they do not personally agree with a client's lifestyle, choices or values.

### **Public Statements by RPNs During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Because Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) hold a position of leadership and trust within the health system and the community, any statements RPNs make in public forums or on social media have the potential to influence the public and to be taken as an expression of professional views or advice.

As such, RPNs are expected to practice in accordance with the Entry Level Competencies, Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice, any applicable practice directions, and the Code of Ethics. These expectations include, but are not limited to:

- Critically reflecting on and integrating the best current evidence from various sources (e.g., published research, clinical practice guidelines, policies, decision-making tools)
- Conducting oneself in a manner that reflects honesty, integrity, reliability, impartiality, and diligence;
- Conducting oneself in a manner that promotes a positive image of the profession at the local, community, provincial, and national levels;
- Advocating for fair and equitable access to services and benefits and for equal treatment and protection of all persons;
- Practicing according to provincial and federal statutes/acts/regulation/by-laws and the Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice; and
- Understanding, promoting, and upholding the ethical values of the profession.
- Using technology, electronic communication and social media responsibly and professionally.

The CRPNM strongly encourages all RPNs to reflect on these and all related professional obligations (including any applicable workplace policies) before engaging in a public forum, and to avoid expressing views that are not supported by evidence such as anti-masking or anti-vaccine viewpoints.

Registered Psychiatric Nurses collaborate in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies, procedures and activities that promote quality care and client safety. As such, it is possible to participate in the ongoing dialogue to suggest improvements to the current pandemic response without contributing to the distribution of scientifically unreliable or inaccurate information that is harmful to the public interest. Any reports of such conduct that are brought to the CRPNM's attention may be subject to further investigation or steps to ensure accountability.

## **Additional Links:**

Code of Ethics and Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice:

<https://crpnm.mb.ca/members/standards-and-legislation/standards-and-code-of-ethics/>

Practice Guidelines:

<https://crpnm.mb.ca/members/practice-resources/practice-guidelines/>

Shared Health Manitoba: COVID-19 Resources for Health Providers:

<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/>

Public Health Agency of Canada: COVID-19 Vaccination Tool Kit for Health Care Providers:

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/diseases-maladies/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/covid-19-healthcare-professionals-vaccine-toolkit.pdf>

World Health Organization: How to report misinformation online:

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/how-to-report-misinformation-online>

## **Contact the Practice Consultant**

204-888-4841 (Ext 104)

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## **References**

College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba, College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba. (2019). *Duty to Provide Care*. Winnipeg, MB: Author.

College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba. (2017). *Professional Boundaries in Psychiatric Nursing*. Winnipeg, MB: Author.

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