



Arizona State Board of Nursing

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An advisory opinion adopted by AZBN is an interpretation of what the law requires. While an advisory opinion is not law, it is more than a recommendation. In other words, an advisory opinion is an official opinion of AZBN regarding the practice of nursing as it relates to the functions of nursing. Facility policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations related to competency, validation, training, and supervision to assure the safety of their patient population and or decrease risk.

OPINION: ABANDONMENT OF PATIENTS
APPROVED: 11/02
REVISED DATE: 3/06, 11/09, 9/12, 1/16, 3/19
ORIGINATING COMMITTEE:
SCOPE OF PRACTICE COMMITTEE

Within the Scope of Practice of RN LPN

ADVISORY OPINION ABANDONMENT OF PATIENTS

STATEMENT OF SCOPE

Registered Nurses (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) are required to provide reasonable notice to their supervisor before transferring care for (or “handing off care”) the established nurse-patient relationship, so that arrangements can be made for continuation of nursing care by others. Terminating the nurse-patient relationship without adequate and reasonable notice constitutes patient abandonment. Transfer of patient care requires directly reporting the condition, circumstances and needs of all patients under the nurses’ care, in oral and/or written form, to another nurse/supervisor who acknowledges receipt and understanding of the report.

The term “patient abandonment” should be differentiated from the term “employment abandonment”, which is related to the employer-employee relationship and is not within the jurisdiction of the Board of Nursing.

I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements define patient abandonment:

- A. Abandonment may occur when a licensed nurse fails to provide adequate patient care, once accepting an assignment, until the responsibility for that patient’s care has been assumed by another licensed nurse or approved licensed health care provider. Patient safety is the key factor in determining the nurse’s responsibility in any given situation.
- B. The nurse must have first ACCEPTED the patient assignment, thus establishing a nurse-patient relationship. Accepting a patient assignment varies from setting to setting and requires a clear understanding of workload and agreement to provide care.
- C. The nurse DISENGAGES the nurse-patient relationship without giving reasonable notice and fails to transfer that patient’s care to a qualified person (e.g. supervisor, nurse) so that arrangements can be made for the continuation of nursing care.
- D. Examples of patient abandonment include, but are not limited to:
 - (1) Leaving the patient care area without giving the supervisor or qualified person adequate & reasonable notice.
 - (2) Leaving the patient care area without giving report to a qualified person
 - (3) Accepting an assignment of patient care and then leaving the nursing unit or

- patient care setting without notifying a qualified person
- (4) In home health or hospice-type settings, if the nurse fails to provide the expected Home visit without prior notification or per facility policy.

II. RATIONALE

Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses maintain a responsibility to protect the health, safety and well-being of their patients. Clear communication between staff and supervisors is essential to ensure continuity of care. Terminating the nurse-patient relationship without adequate notice constitutes patient abandonment and places the patient at risk for harm. This Advisory Opinion is intended to provide the nursing community with guidelines to clarify those circumstances which may be characterized as patient abandonment.

III. REFERENCES

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