

**Katie Hobbs**  
Governor



**Joey Ridenour**  
Executive Director

## **Arizona State Board of Nursing**

1740 W Adams Street Suite 2000  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
Phone (602) 771-7800  
Home Page: [www.azbn.gov](http://www.azbn.gov)

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,**  
**5/23**  
**ORIGINATING COMMITTEE:**  
**SCOPE OF PRACTICE COMMITTEE**

Within the Scope of Practice of X RN X 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.

There is no ethical expectation nor obligation inherent in the nurse’s duty to care that requires nurses must sacrifice or trade their own safety or health for the benefit of others. In a situation when the nurse feels their own life is in danger (e.g., active shooter), leaving the patient is NOT considered abandonment.

#### **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 setting without giving report to a qualified person
    - (3) Accepting a patient care assignment 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

- American Nurses Association. (2022). *Risk and responsibility in providing nursing care*. ANA. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nursing-excellence/official-position-statements/id/risk-and-responsibility-in-providing-nursing-care/>
- Cathy Dinauer (n.d) Patient Abandonment. *Nevada Board of Nursing*. Retrieved from <http://epubs.democratprinting.com/article/PATIENT+ABANDONMENT/2029480/0/article.html>
- Koch, G. (2023). Is protecting your own life during an active shooter situation at work patient abandonment? *Oregon State Board of Nursing Sentinel*, 42(1), 12–13.
- Nebraska Board of nursing (2018). *Patient Abandonment*. Retrieved from <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Licensure/Documents/Abandonment.pdf>
- New Brunswick. *What is meant by patient Abandonment?* Retrieved from <http://www.nanb.nb.ca/media/resource/APA-Vol47-No1-E.pdf>
- New York State Office of the Professions (2015). *Abandonment of Patients Who Need Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/nurse/nurse-patientabandonment.htm>
- North Carolina Board of Nursing (2013) *Staffing and Patient Safety: Position Statement for Patient Safety*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbon.com/vdownloads/position-statements-decision-trees/staffing-and-patient-safety.pdf>
- North Dakota Board of Nursing (2012) *Abandonment*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndbon.org/RegulationsPractice/PracticeStatements/Abandonment.asp>
- Oklahoma Board of Nursing (2018). *Abandonment Statement*. Retrieved from <https://nursing.ok.gov/prac-aband.pdf>

South Carolina Board of Nursing (2015). *Position Statement on Patient Abandonment*. Retrieved from <https://www.llr.sc.gov/pol/nursing/PStatements/patientabandonment.pdf>

South Dakota Board of Nursing (2018). *Abandonment*. Retrieved from <http://doh.sd.gov/boards/nursing/AdvisoryPracticeOpinions/Abandonment.pdf>

Tennessee Board of Nursing (2018). *Position Statements*. Retrieved from [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/healthprofboards/nursing/position-statements/Nursing%20Position\\_Statement\\_Booklet.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/healthprofboards/nursing/position-statements/Nursing%20Position_Statement_Booklet.pdf)

Texas Board of Nursing (2016). *Board Rules associated with alleged patient abandonment*. [https://www.bon.texas.gov/practice\\_bon\\_position\\_statements\\_content.asp#15.6](https://www.bon.texas.gov/practice_bon_position_statements_content.asp#15.6)

Torpe Dawn (2016). *What is Meant by Patient Abandonment?* Nursing Association of New Brunswick. Retrieved from <http://www.nanb.nb.ca/media/resource/APA-Vol47-No1-E.pdf>

Vermont state board of nursing (2015). *Abandonment Position Statement*. Retrieved from <https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/716284/PS-Abandonment-2015-1012.pdf>