

A Guide to the Professional Responsibility Workload Reporting Process for Public Health Units

ONA members indicate it is important and worth the work to complete Professional Responsibility Workload (PRW) Report forms.

Nurses who use the professional responsibility process are taking steps to correct excessive workload situations and meet their professional responsibility requirements as client advocates, ensuring the provision of safe quality client care.

ONA collective agreement language on professional responsibility varies, as does the process used to report and address workload issues. It is important members recognize this fact and be aware of the process required in their particular circumstance(s).

Why Complete and Submit a PRW Report Form?

1. The form is a mechanism to identify and address quality client care issues, thereby fulfilling the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) professional standards.
2. The form serves as documentation and protection for the individual nurse(s) advocating on behalf of the client for safe, quality client care.
3. The form is a mechanism to address staff safety, equipment failures or lack of supplies, identifying and improving unsatisfactory working environments/conditions.
4. The form puts the onus on the employer to address the issues.
5. The form serves as a mechanism for improving communication and cooperation between the nurse(s) and the employer.

The use of the PRW reporting process and form has proven that positive change can happen, and is demonstrated by results such as: increasing registered staff and support workers; change in policy and procedures; additional equipment; and improved communication in the workplace.

Ever changing demands on the nurse's workload has been creating an environment where the PHN or RN finds herself/himself wondering how it is possible to meet the CNO standards of care required.

Nurses are taking on more of the workload and there is increased demand for service in the available hours. There is a lack of staff, lack of adequate equipment and/or supplies and other resources. There is an increased sick leave usage and workplace accidents are on the rise.

CNO requires a nurse to identify, report and work with the employer to resolve issues, in order to provide safe, quality client care.

There are five aspects of practice for which public health (PH) nurses are most frequently reported to CNO:

1. Failure to assess the client.
2. Failure to intervene/take appropriate action.
3. Medication administration/documentation errors.
4. Failure to ensure client safety.
5. Poor interpersonal/communication skills.

Employers are also utilizing these practice examples to discipline nurses.

PRW Reporting Process

The process and form are useful for issues of:

- Workload.
- Competency.
- Procedures.
- Documentation: protection for the nurse/evidence to support change.

An example of when a **workload** issue must be reported: A member in her/his professional judgment is concerned that insufficient staffing or gapping of positions (i.e. not filling positions) will prevent her/him from adequately performing all the assigned tasks within work hours, resulting in compromised client care. The PHN and RN must advocate for safe, quality client care.

A **competency** issue may occur when an employer hires an unregulated care provider to assist with immunization clinics. The concern would be that the unregulated care provider does not have adequate training or level of competency to immunize clients. The PHN/RN must intervene to ensure client safety. Failing to report such a situation to the employer could constitute professional misconduct on the part of the nurse.

A **procedure** issue may occur where the employer has lay people buddied with high risk mothers as a support system. If a PHN working in the healthy babies, healthy children program becomes aware of a breakdown with the buddy system and fails to report it to a manager it could compromise client care; it is the responsibility of the RN to advocate for the improvement of client care.

The following process can and should be used in all sites:

At the time the workload issue occurs, using established lines of communication, seek immediate assistance from your manager/supervisor, discuss the matter and develop strategies to meet client care needs using current resources. If you achieve a resolution at the early stage, please complete the form to Section 5 of the document. If no satisfactory resolution is reached, submit the PRW Report form completed in its entirety as per your collective agreement. (A sample form is attached.)

Note: When you asked for assistance: Was the outcome satisfactory to allow you to give safe, quality client care, were you able to take your breaks, complete the assigned work, and is this a recurring issue that needs to be addressed? If the answer to any of these questions is NO, you should complete a PRW Report form and follow the steps of the process.

Tip: If the issue of workload is resolved, but you feel this may become a recurring issue, complete the form and follow the process, making suggestions to prevent the issue from recurring or becoming a problem. This also allows a tracking tool for the Union to use in addressing future problems.

How to Use the PRW Report Forms

Many nurses find it difficult speaking on issues of workload with their managers; however, it is a step in the process and employers will insist that the process be followed. This is one area that seems to dissuade members from filing workload forms. Many members insist their managers get “defensive” and retaliate.

There is no doubt that some managers are taking the filing of workload forms personally and discourage staff from filing by retaliation, threats and suggestions that “well, perhaps it’s your lack of organization; perhaps we should review your performance.” It is important to remind your managers that it is your professional responsibility to report and address issues in order to provide safe, quality client care. If your manager is a nurse or other regulated health professional, it is their professional responsibility to respond and address issues in order to provide safe, quality client care.

Try this:

- Approach the manager and explain the importance and benefits to the employer and to the clients if nurses file the forms. Explain this process is not a grievance, is not personal and the process is quite different. Explain that it will assist the manager in meeting her/his professional responsibility under their regulatory college.
- The goal of any meeting on issues of workload is to resolve the issues quickly and satisfactorily for all parties so that safe, quality client care is provided.
- When completing a PRW Report form, the information required in the documentation includes the following: those duties that would have been performed had time permitted and those duties that were delayed; an identification of unsafe situations; the amount of overtime worked; whether proper assessments were completed; whether deadlines were met; and finally, whether or not quality client care was provided.

Contact your Labour Relations Officer (LRO) at any stage of the process:

You may want to involve the LRO for support at your meetings, especially if your employer is not cooperating. ONA has Professional Practice Specialists who are valuable resources that can lend support and suggestions on strategies to resolve your issues.

Be familiar with the CNO *Standard* publication for direction on issues related to workload, such as:

- Tips for Avoiding Complaints (March 2002).
- Working Overtime and Fatigue (September 2001).
- Refusing a Shift and Abandoning Clients (September 2001).

If members are still filling out the form when a situation is resolved, they only have to fill it out to the end of Section 5.

Be a client advocate! File PRW Report forms and meet your professional responsibility requirements to provide quality client care.

A success story – it's worth the effort!

The nurses in a Public Health Unit met over a period of three months to attempt to resolve issues of workload concerns documented on PRW Report forms.

The Bargaining Unit representative and another Bargaining Unit member met with the LRO on several occasions to plan and present workload issues to the Manager and Director of Public Health Nursing. Their recommendations were supported by concrete rationale using the professional standards of care, incident reports and the benefits of addressing the concerns. These were presented at a Union-management meeting and the LRO attended.

A committee comprised of the employer and members worked together to resolve the issues in the following way:

- The Supervisor asked the Director to speak to the Medical Officer of Health about the need for additional resources.
- Issues around the inappropriate use of unregulated lay people supporting high risk mothers in the HBHC program were used to identify potential risk
- The employer has identified a process whereby breakdowns in the buddy system to high risk mothers are identified and dealt with appropriately.
- PHNs will look at how they assess high risk mothers and their buddy and early intervention

These are just some of the outcomes the committee met and worked on. After the initial meeting, the employer came to the table prepared to listen and work with the Union and its employees. The overall outcome was an increased respect by management for the PHNs' concerns, as well as awareness by the employer of the liabilities it faced by not addressing the issues raised.

The process opened communication and showed a positive approach by both parties to find solutions that would improve conditions for everyone.

Follow up is an important part of the process and it is easy to fall victim to complacency. There will always be problems and sometimes our recommendations don't work, no matter how hard we try ... or we fall back into the old habits. When that happens, it's back to the drawing board, because when workload gets to be too onerous and unsafe, and you cannot provide safe quality client care, you have a professional responsibility and a choice. File PRW Report forms and bring about change.