

# Nursing Roles in Abortion Care

Clinical Responsibility and  
Professional Ethics

**Amy Levi, PhD, CNM, WHNP-BC**  
Albers Professor of Midwifery  
University of New Mexico

**UCSF**

University of California  
San Francisco

*advancing health worldwide™*

# The Role of the Professional Nurse

# The International Council of Nurses

## Definition of Nursing

“Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, and education are also key nursing roles.”

# The ICN Position Statement on Women's Health

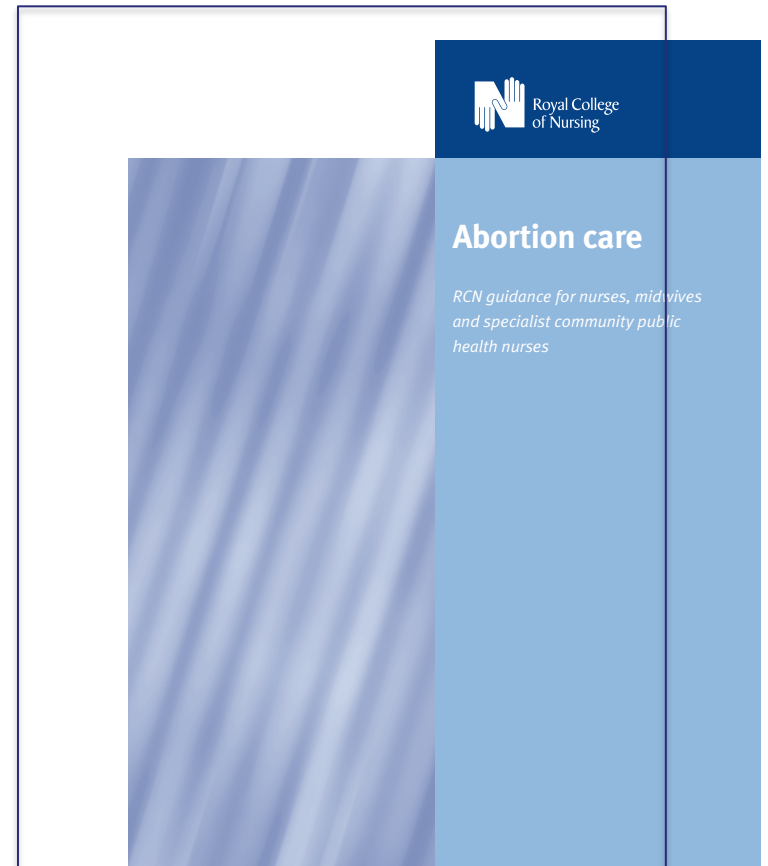


“Women’s right to health and well-being must be protected throughout the lifespan... During their reproductive years women need control over their reproductive health rights.”

# Nursing Care of the Abortion Patient

# Royal College of Nursing Abortion Care

- Guidance for nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses



# RCN Guidelines: Professional Role

- Access and referral
- Patient assessment
- Options counseling
- Preparation for the procedure
- Post-abortion care
- Maintenance of patient confidentiality



# RCN Guidelines: Ethical Responsibility

A nurse who has a conscientious objection to participation in abortion care has the following responsibilities:

- Inform his/her employer
- Request removal from any *non-emergent* provision of care
- “Nurses cannot refuse to provide care for these women”



# Nursing Care Activities in the Care of the Abortion Patient

# The Nurse's Role in Pregnancy Testing

- Perform an assessment of pregnancy wantedness
- Be nonjudgmental in the approach to the patient and her wishes
- Demonstrate support of the woman's decision



# The Nurse's Role in Options Counseling

- Provide information about all available options
- Be nonjudgmental
- Show support for the woman's decision
- Allow her to explore the consequences of her decision without interference

# The Nurse's Role in Pre-procedure Counseling

## Obtaining consent:

- Explanation of the procedure
- Identification of potential complications
- Procedures that might be required as the result of complications

# The Nurse's Role in Post-Procedure Counseling

- Review what to expect in a normal course in terms of both physical and emotional symptoms
- Review possible deviations from normal that require immediate intervention
- Provide adequate information about how and where to seek continued care, including emotional support

# The Nurse's Role in Post-Procedure Contraceptive Care

- Ensure that counseling has occurred prior to the procedure, with consent for LARC as appropriate
- Provide information about possible side effects
- Provide information about possible deviations from normal that require immediate follow up
- Ensure that information is provided for long-term follow up and care

# Nursing Ethics and Conscientious Objection

# The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses

“Inherent in nursing is a respect for human rights, including cultural rights, the right to life and choice, to dignity and to be treated with respect. Nursing care is respectful of and unrestricted by considerations of age, colour, creed, culture, disability or illness, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, politics, race or social status.”



# The ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses

## Provision 1:

“The nurse, in all professional relationships, practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and uniqueness of every individual, unrestricted by considerations of social or economic status, personal attributes, or the nature of health problems”

# The ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses

## Provision 2:

“Nurses must examine the conflicts arising between their own personal and professional values, the values and interests of others who are also responsible for patient care and health care decisions, as well as those of patients. Nurses strive to ***resolve such conflicts in ways that ensure patient safety***, guard the patient's best interests and preserve the professional integrity of the nurse.”

The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, or community.

# Nursing Roles in Abortion Care

- The Royal College of Nursing provides useful guidance for nurses participating in abortion care
- Nursing ethics as defined by the International Council of Nurses and the American Nurses Association emphasize the importance of meeting patient needs first and foremost
- Patient safety and the patient's best interest must be preserved, even when the nurse experiences conflict with the patient's own choices

# Bibliography

American Nurses Association. (2001). Code of Ethics for Nurses. Available from:  
<http://www.nursingworld.org/codeofethics>

International Council of Nurses. Documents available from:  
<http://www.icn.ch/about-icn/icn-definition-of-nursing/icn-definition-of-nursing-618.html>

Royal College of Nursing. (2008). Abortion care: RCN guidance for nurses, midwives, and specialist community public health nurses. Royal College of Nursing: London, UK.