

FOR PSA MEMBERS: KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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## Update: Nurses – know your rights and obligations

The PSA would like to share this critical information: It is crucial to adhere to ethical rules governing the nursing profession and operate within the prescribed scope of practice. The confirmation of nurses' rights is essential not only for their benefit but also to ensure improved service delivery to patients.

Nurses are protected by the following rights stemming from their professional status, legislation, and their service conditions:

- **Practice within legally permissible scope:** Nurses have the right to practice within the scope defined by law for their specific area of practice. It ensures that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their responsibilities.
- **Safe working environment:** Nurses should have a safe working environment that promotes efficient patient care. This includes having minimum physical resources, materials, and adequate personnel to perform their duties effectively.
- **Proper orientation and in-service education:** Nurses have the right to receive appropriate orientation and ongoing in-service education regarding treatment modalities and relevant procedures for their specific work settings. This ensures that they stay updated with the latest practices and provide high-quality care.
- **Continuing professional education:** Nurses have the right to negotiate with their employers for continuing professional education that directly or indirectly relates to their responsibilities. This helps nurses to enhance their skills and knowledge continuously.
- **Involvement in policy determination:** Registered nurses have the right to equal and full participation in policy determination, planning, and decision-making processes concerning patient treatment and care. Their expertise and insights are valuable in shaping effective healthcare policies.
- **Advocacy for patients and personnel:** Nurses have the responsibility to advocate for and protect the rights of both patients and healthcare personnel under their care. This includes ensuring patient safety and wellbeing, as well as advocating for the rights and needs of fellow colleagues.
- **Conscientious objection:** Nurses have the right to conscientious objection, provided that it does not compromise patient safety or interrupt their treatment and care. This right should be communicated to the employer in writing in a timely manner.
- **Refusal to perform tasks outside scope or expertise:** Nurses have the right to refuse tasks that are reasonably deemed outside the scope of their practice or for which they have insufficient training,

knowledge, or skills. This ensures patient safety and prevents the nurse from engaging in incompetent or unethical practices.

- **Policy guidelines for the working environment:** Nurses have the right to written policy guidelines and prescriptions that govern the management of their working environment. These guidelines ensure that nurses can provide care within a structured framework.
- **Refusal to implement prescriptions not in the patient's interest:** Nurses have the right to refuse to implement a prescription or participate in activities that, based on their professional knowledge and judgement, are not in the best interest of the patient. This safeguards patient well-being and ensures ethical practice.
- **Disclosure of patient diagnosis:** Nurses have the right to be informed about the diagnosis of patients under their care. This knowledge enables them to provide appropriate treatment and support.
- **Safe working environment free of threats or interference:** Nurses have the right to work in an environment that is free from threats, intimidation, and any form of interference. This promotes a positive and safe workplace culture.
- **Medical-support and referral system:** Nurses should have access to a medical-support or referral system to handle emergency situations responsibly. This ensures that patients receive timely and appropriate care in critical situations.

By recognising and upholding these rights, public servant association nurses can fulfill their duty of providing excellent care to patients and contribute to the overall improvement of healthcare services.

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