Master’s Entry Program in Nursing (MEPN)

Title: Impaired Nursing Student
Guideline #: BRN 02-13

Owner: MEPN Program Administration
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I. Purpose
The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to faculty and staff to assure that patients, other students, faculty and staff are protected from harm; and, to encourage and facilitate treatment for the student who is impaired due to substance abuse, mental illness or excessive stress.

II. Definitions
The School of Nursing (SON) defines impairment as being under the influence of a psychoactive substance or experiencing a psychological illness or excessive stress that affects clinical judgment and the ability to administer safe patient care.

Impairment is the condition of being unable to perform as a consequence of physical or mental unfitness and includes impairment in work/clinical performance, scholarly activities or student life.

Substances covered by this policy include alcohol and controlled substances, as defined in schedules I through V of the Controlled Substances Act, 21 United States Code Section 812, and by regulation at 21 Code of Federal Regulations section 1308.

Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning.

III. Background
Nursing students may be subject to substance abuse and mental illness problems due to stressful situations as they try to balance work, school, and personal obligations which may exacerbate underlying conditions or predispositions. Students who are impaired due to substance abuse, mental illness or excessive stress need access to professional assistance and need to be removed immediately from situations where they may cause harm. The California Board of Registered
Nursing (BRN) requires that students be informed as to the importance of voluntarily seeking help for these issues as not doing so may prevent them from being licensed to practice nursing.

IV. **Responsibility**

Administration, faculty, students, and Student Health & Counseling Services.

V. **Procedure**

- **Student Self-Disclosure**: If the student self-identifies that they have a substance abuse, mental illness or problem with excessive stress, they will be referred to Student Health & Counseling Services or to their physician/provider for evaluation and treatment. Once evaluation is complete, the director and the faculty will decide with input from the physician or therapist, if the student is able to return to clinical with or without restrictions. The student must submit a plan for relapse prevention and the School may request progress reports of rehabilitation and/or therapy from the student's provider.

- **School Identified**: If the student does not self-identify the following procedure will be followed:
  - If faculty identifies a student experiencing signs and symptoms of substance abuse, mental illness or excessive stress, he/she will immediately remove the student from the classroom or clinical area.
  - The faculty will assess whether this student is suicidal, homicidal or gravely disabled and requires police intervention and transportation to a mental health facility. If faculty cannot assess the student or feels harm is imminent, he/she must immediately call 911 or initiate emergency protocols per the clinical facility's procedures. If the faculty feels harm is not imminent, he/she should escort the student to the ER for further evaluation and/or treatment.
  - When on the UCSF campus, if the faculty feels harm is not imminent but feels s/he requires assistance with this decision, faculty may call the non-emergency number for campus police (415) 476-1414 and an officer will evaluate the student. The faculty may wish to escort the student to campus police after class to protect the student’s privacy or may feel it more appropriate to ask campus police to come to their campus location depending on the situation.
  - If the student does not fit the criteria for being suicidal, homicidal or gravely disabled, the faculty will arrange for someone to drive the student home and give the student an alternative assignment for make-up work as appropriate.
  - Signs and symptoms of substance abuse, mental illness or excessive stress include but are not limited to the following:
    - Odor of alcohol or marijuana on breath
• Slurred or incoherent speech, hand tremors, and/or lack of coordination
• Chronic drowsiness or sleeping in class, forgetfulness, blackouts, spaciness, frequent sneezing
• Increased absenteeism, arriving late and wishing to leave early, frequently requesting time off, taking extended meal and coffee breaks, frequent trips to the bathroom, frequent complaints of injury or illness
• Unusually aggressive behavior, unreasonable resentment, overreaction to criticism, inflexibility, controlling behavior, irritability, suspiciousness, defensiveness, blaming, frequent conflicts
• Isolation and withdrawal, difficulties with interpersonal relationships
• Deteriorating appearance, unexplained weight loss or gain, excessive bruising
• Increasing numbers of errors and poor judgment in nursing care

• The faculty will immediately alert the director or assistant director. Faculty will provide the assistant director and director, in a timely fashion, with objective documentation of behaviors exhibited by the student. This documentation will include whether patient outcomes were affected due to the student’s behavior. If patient outcomes were negatively affected, the faculty must also immediately alert clinical staff and fill out an Incidence or Occurrence Report per agency protocol.

• A conference will be arranged as soon as possible between the faculty, student and assistant director/director to discuss student behavior during clinical.

• The student will be referred to Student Health & Counseling Services or to their physician/provider for evaluation and treatment. Once evaluation is complete, the director and/or the assistant director and the faculty will decide with input from the physician or therapist, if the student is able to return to the student’s clinical experience with or without restrictions. The student must submit a plan for relapse prevention and the School may request progress reports of rehabilitation and/or therapy from the student’s provider.

VI. Related Documents

• BRN Director’s Handbook, Impaired Nursing Students: Guidelines for Schools of Nursing in Dealing with the Matter of Nursing Students Impaired by Chemical Dependency and Emotional Illness, 8.12

VII. Appendix /Resources

• This policy will be posted on the UCSF School of Nursing website for student access.