

ADDRESSING WORKLOAD & INSUFFICIENT STAFFING FAQ

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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, WORKLOAD, AND STAFFING?

Professional practice incorporates legislative, regulatory, professional, organizational, best practice, and evidence-informed practices that directly relate to your ability to practice as a registered nurse and provide care. Regulatory requirements are the minimum expectations of a registered nurse set by the CRNS or CRPNS. These minimum requirements are defined in professional legislation, bylaws, entry-level competencies, standards, codes of ethics, scope of practice, and related interpretive documents.

Workload can be challenging to define, and the SUN/SAHO collective agreement can help you understand. It is when registered nurses are expected to do more work than is consistent with proper patient care. This can include excess work, additional tasks and/or assignments, non-nursing duties, or responsibilities and expectations that may not be reasonable.

Staffing is about ensuring that the 'right provider is providing care to the right patient, in the right place, at the right time with the right resources'. Insufficient staffing can, and does, create workload for registered nurses and places patients, staff, and professional practice at risk. SUN collective agreements apply to GNs, RNs, RN (AAPs), GNP, NPs, GPNs, and RPNs who are members of the union, as well as their work and professional practice. We work in collaborative work environments, but our primary focus is ensuring appropriate registered nursing practice within teams.

WHY ARE WORKLOAD AND INSUFFICIENT STAFFING SIGNIFICANT?

Workload and insufficient registered nurse staffing represent the most significant professional practice concerns reported in Work Situation Reports. These concerns indicate what prevents registered nurses from providing safe, competent, ethical, appropriate, and high-quality patient care in healthy, quality work environments. They represent the inability to provide care according to legislative, regulatory, professional, and organizational obligations.

Registered nurses who cannot fulfill their patient care obligations due to workload, insufficient staff, support, and/or resources must address these concerns in real-time to protect patients and their registered nurse licence to practice.

WHAT ARTICLES IN THE SUN COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT ADDRESS MINIMUM STAFFING?

No collective agreement articles address a minimum staffing requirement for SUN members. However, guidelines, best practices, and RN-to-Patient/Nurse-to-Patient ratios exist in other jurisdictions that can inform professional practice and the work environment.

WHAT CAN I DO TO ADDRESS WORKLOAD AND INSUFFICIENT STAFFING?

SUN members at the front-line, and as Charge Nurses, need to use the full extent of their collective agreement to create healthy, quality work environments that are supportive and focused on registered nurses, patients, and patient safety.

WHAT ARTICLES IN THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT ADDRESS WORKLOAD AND INSUFFICIENT STAFFING?

The SUN/SAHO collective agreement has two primary articles that should be used in real time when SUN members are concerned about workload and/or insufficient staffing: Articles 9.03 and 56.03.

- **Article 9.03**

If additional staff are necessary, and no registered nurse management personnel are available [emphasis added], the registered nurse designated in charge shall have the authority to call such additional staff subject to criteria established by the Employer in consultation with the registered nurses in the work Unit. In the event the Employer has not established criteria, the registered nurse shall have the authority to call additional staff that in her professional opinion are necessary (SUN/SAHO, 2021, p. 26).

- **Article 56.03**

- a. Where an individual Employee or group of Employees have cause to believe that she or they are being asked to perform more work than is consistent with proper client care, or to perform work in violation of her professional responsibilities, she shall first discuss concerns with co-workers/team and In-Charge nurse on the unit, as provided in the Algorithm Chart for the Joint NAC Process (Appendix B).
- b. If the issue is not resolved, the registered nurse will notify the out-of-scope Manager or On-Call Manager/designate of the situation for further discussion and timely resolution. Notification may include a face-to-face discussion or a telephone call.
 - i. if the issue remains unresolved, a SUN Work Situation Report (WSR) will be filled out; or
 - ii. if no Manager or On-Call Manager/designate is available, a voice message will be left or email will be sent and an WSR filled out.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN THERE ARE CONCERNS ABOUT WORKLOAD AND INSUFFICIENT STAFFING?

There is a two-step process that registered nurses should use:

- SUN members who are assigned as Charge Nurse should use Article 9.03
 - First, determine whether registered nurse management is available or within the chain of command.
 - If registered nurse management is available, contact them to discuss your concerns and work with them to find a solution.
 - If registered nurse management is unavailable, you can call in additional staff based on established criteria.
 - If no joint criteria exist, you can call in additional staff based on unit assessment and needs.
 - If staff are called in, please advise your Manager that Article 9.03 has been used.
 - Step 2: If Step 1 does not resolve the workload or insufficient staffing, then Article 56.03 needs to be the next step.
 - Initiate low-level resolution, contact your Out-of-Scope Manager/Designate, and if the issue is not resolved, notify them that a Work Situation Report will be completed.
 - Make sure you indicate in Step 2 of the Work Situation Report that you have used Article 9.03.

WHEN SHOULD I COMPLETE A WORK SITUATION REPORT?

Every time there is a professional practice, workload, and/or staffing concern about registered nursing practice that is not resolved with low-level resolution. To learn more about Work Situation Reports and the Nursing Advisory Process, including learning modules, frequently asked questions, and resources, visit the SUN website.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES?

SUN has created several frequently asked questions and resources on topical issues affecting professional practice, and members are encouraged to contact their regulatory body (CRNS/CRPNS).

HOW DO I DECIDE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS CONCERNS?

Member concerns can intersect between Professional Practice and Labour Relations.

Professional Practice concerns are addressed through the Nursing Advisory Process, including registered nursing practice, patient/resident/client safety, workload, staffing, fulfilling your professional practice obligations, or anything that negatively affects registered nursing care. See Articles 56 – 58 and Appendices A – F in the SUN/SAHO collective agreement.

Labour Relations concerns are addressed through the Grievance Process, including breaches of any other articles in your collective agreement, violations of member rights, or breaches or changes in applying an Employer policy/procedure. This would apply to all articles other than those about Professional Practice noted above.

WHAT IF THE SUN/SAHO COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT DOESN'T APPLY TO ME?

The charge and nursing practice language vary in other SUN collective agreements. Review the following articles that apply to your work environment and contact your SUN Labour Relations Officer and/or Nursing Practice Officer for assistance.

- All Nations Healing Hospital: See Article 9 – Charge Pay & Article 53 – Nursing Practice
- Samaritan Place Corporation: See Article 8 – Charge Pay & Article 36 – Nursing Practice
- Athol Murray College of Notre Dame: See Article 10 – In-Charge Pay
- Board of Education of the Regina School Division: See Letter of Understanding #1
- Canadian Blood Services: See Article 13 – Charge Pay & Article 33 – Donor Care

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR NEED ADVICE?

You can contact various experts, including your SUN Local Executive, SUN Labour Relations and/or Nurse Practice Officers, regulatory bodies, and the Canadian Nurses Protective Society, which provides professional liability protection to members.

- [SUN Labour Relations Officer/Nurse Practice Officer Servicing Assignments](#)
- [College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan \(CRNS\) – Nursing Practice Consultation](#)
- [College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Saskatchewan \(CRPNS\) – Practice Program](#)
- [Canadian Nurses Protective Society \(CNPS\) – Legal Advice](#)