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## **Delegation: What are the Nurse's Responsibilities?**

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the article is to provide information about delegation and to enhance the nurse's knowledge, skills, and application of delegation principles.

Nurses will gain enhanced knowledge regarding:

- An outline of the four steps of the delegation process
- A description of the roles and responsibilities of the RN, LPN, UAP, and nursing administrator/manager
- Identify strategies for promoting effective delegation

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*Regina, R.N., received change of shift report from the night nurse. It was communicated during report that Mr. Sharp in Room 16 had fluctuations in his blood pressure during the night. At the completion of the shift report, Regina, R.N., organized the planning of nursing care for her assigned clients. As usual she felt there was never enough time to complete the care that was needed. She noted on the staff roster that Tara, NAI, was scheduled for her assignment of clients. Regina, R.N., gathered the equipment to begin assessments and treatments. She briefly greeted Tara, Nurse Aide I (NAI), in the hallway and quickly instructed her to check a blood pressure on Mr. Sharp in Room 16. Tara, NAI, reviewed her list of clients and noted that Mr. Sharp was on her schedule to have routine vital signs performed, including a blood pressure check. She then proceeded to perform the routine vital sign checks on her clients. Fifty-five minutes into the shift, Regina, R.N., having completed the care for her other clients which included sending one for dialysis and another for a surgical procedure, entered Mr. Smith's room to perform the morning assessment. Upon entering the room, she found Mr. Smith unresponsive. She quickly called Tara, NAI, to find out Mr. Smith's morning blood pressure result. Tara stated she was just getting around to check his blood pressure along with his other vital signs. She had been busy checking the other clients' morning vital signs. Regina, R.N., quickly checked Mr. Smith's blood pressure and obtained a result of 226/128. She proceeded to perform an assessment and notify the physician..*

- *What were the nurse's responsibilities?*
- *What were the NAI's responsibilities?*
- *What went wrong in the delegation process and how could this incident have been prevented?*

## **Introduction/Background**

New technologies, medical advances, economic constraints, and governmental regulations have necessitated the restructuring of health care delivery systems and workforce. The National Council of State Board of Nursing (2005) states the demand for nursing services has continued to escalate due to an increased client population with chronic diseases, longer life expectancies, and the delivery of healthcare in non-traditional settings. Healthcare facilities/agencies often use a skill mix of Registered Nurse (RN), Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), and unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) to provide safe cost-effective nursing care. As the use of UAP increases, the RN and LPN must also develop and utilize knowledge and critical thinking skills crucial to effective delegation (Ballard & Gould, 2001). Effective delegation promotes the delivery of safe client care and permits the nurse to focus on the provision of crucial nursing activities and responsibilities. Delegation is an essential competency of nursing practice and fosters work efficiency gained by the team approach. UAP are valuable members of the team. Nursing delegation to UAP permits a greater quantity of nursing care to be provided than one nurse could safely provide alone. The American Nurses Association (2005) emphasizes that nurses are required to provide safe competent nursing care. Therefore, nursing decisions related to the delegation of tasks/activities to UAP must always be grounded in the protection of the public and the provision of safe competent nursing care. Outcomes for quality client care and safety are

dependent upon effective delegation by the nurse. To provide effective delegation to UAP, the nurse must develop delegation competencies.

## Definitions

Delegation is a decision-making process that requires the nurse to use nursing knowledge and judgment, possess an understanding of the nursing law and rules, and retain accountability for the delegation and the outcome of nursing care. Nursing practice often uses the terms of assignment and delegation interchangeably. However, the North Carolina Nursing Administrative Code for nursing has specific definitions for delegation and assignment as well as other terms related to delegation. Listed are definitions pertinent to the nurse's responsibilities for delegation:

- authority – the power to act
- assigning or assignment – to designate responsibility for implementation of a specific activity or set of activities to a person licensed and competent to perform such activities [21 NCAC 36.0120 (7)].

The person licensed and competent to perform such activities is the nurse. Examples of assignment are:

- the RN assigns to other RNs and LPNs, and
- the LPN assigns to other LPNs.
- delegation – to transfer or hand-off to a competent individual the authority to perform a task/activity in a specific setting/situation [21 NCAC 36.0120 (17)].

The term “competent individual” refers to UAP. The nurse delegates the performance of a task to UAP thereby transferring the responsibility for the performance of the task. The nurse maintains accountability for the delegation and the overall provision of nursing care. Both the RN and LPN may delegate to UAP.

- nursing care activities – tasks/activities UAP may perform as delegated by nurse
- accountability/responsibility – to be answerable for action or inaction of self, and of others in the context of delegation or assignment (21 NCAC 36.0120 (8)).

The nurse maintains accountability for appropriate delegation. The nurse is accountable for the decision to delegate the tasks/activities and responsible for ensuring the nursing care is performed correctly in accordance with a standard of practice and facility/agency policy. The person to whom the task/activity has been delegated is accountable for performing the task correctly and according to the facility/agency policies and procedures.

- supervision – to oversee and provide guidance, direction, evaluation, and follow-up by the nurse for the performance of assigned and delegated nursing activity or set of activities [21 NCAC 36.0120 (49)].

The nurse maintains responsibility for supervising or monitoring UAP to whom tasks have been delegated.

- unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) – any unlicensed person who through the delegation process provides client care activities. Titles for UAP include, but are not limited to Nurse Aide I (NAI), Nurse Aide II (NAII), Medication Aide, nurse tech, medical assistant, medical office assistant, personal care assistant, habilitation tech, etc.

## Authority of the Nursing Practice Act

The Nursing Practice Act (NPA) is the General Statute through which the Board of Nursing (BON) has authority to regulate nursing practice in North Carolina. The NPA serves to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The BON's mission statement is to protect the public by regulating the practice of nursing (North Carolina Board of Nursing). The NPA and Rules define the legal parameters for nursing practice and the criteria that must be in place for appropriate nursing delegation to UAP. Delegation is a component of the scope of practice for both the RN and LPN:

- RN – is permitted to teach, assign, delegate, and supervise licensed and unlicensed personnel for the implementation of the nursing plan of care (NPA, 2009); and
- LPN – is permitted to assign or delegate nursing interventions to other LPNs and UAP under the supervision of the RN (NPA, 2019).

The NPA authorizes the BON to identify the nursing care activities that may be delegated to UAP (NPA, 2009) and to establish the NAI and NAII Task List. The BON has also developed a Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP as a tool to guide the nurse in making appropriate delegation decisions for nursing care activities. The NAI and NAII Task Lists and the Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP are located on the BON website at [www.ncbon.com](http://www.ncbon.com).

### **Principles of Delegation**

Delegation is a process of decision-making based on assessing, planning, assuring accountability, communicating, monitoring performance, evaluating the care provided, and modifying the nursing plan of care. To provide appropriate delegation the nurse must be knowledgeable of the NPA and Rules, facility/agency policies and procedures, job description, and clinical competence of UAP. Decisions to delegate nursing tasks/activities to UAP are based on the RN's assessment of the client's nursing care needs and the following criteria [21 NCAC 36.0401 (c)]:

- UAP's knowledge and skills;
- verification of UAP's clinical competence by an RN; and
- variables in the practice setting:
  - complexity and frequency of nursing care needed;
  - proximity of clients to staff;
  - accessible resources;
  - qualifications and number of staff;
  - facility/agency policies and procedures, practices, and channels of communication that support activities that may be delegated; and
  - stability of the client's condition.

Stability refers to predictability of the client's condition which includes the absence of risk of complications and the rate of change in status that may occur. Complex and unpredictable nursing care needed by the client would require the care to be provided by a nurse (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005). The delegation process consists of four essential steps:

- assessment and planning,
- communication,
- supervision and monitoring, and
- evaluation.

### **Step one: Assessment and Implementation**

Assessment and Implementation require the RN to determine the appropriateness of the tasks/activities that may be legally delegated to UAP. The BON Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP provides a configuration of the assessment and planning process (North Carolina Board of Nursing). Assessment begins with the requirement that the task must be within the scope of practice of the nurse. This is followed by the RN assessment of the client's nursing care needs. Next, the delegation decision must be made by a nurse that is competent in performing the task/activity. For example, a nurse that is competent in applying a condom catheter may determine this to be an appropriate task to delegate to an NAI; whereas a nurse who has never provided colostomy care would not be appropriate to delegate this task to an NAII. The nurse then determines whether the task/activity meets all of the criteria listed in Rule 21 NCAC 36.0221 (b):

- recur frequently in the daily care of the client or group of clients;
- be performed according to an established sequence of steps;
- involve little or no modification from one client care situation to another;
- be performed with a predictable outcome;
- does not involve or require ongoing assessment, interpretation, or decision making which cannot be logically separated from the procedure(s) itself; and
- does not endanger the well-being or life of the client.

After identifying tasks/activities appropriate to delegate to UAP, the RN aligns the nursing plan of care with the qualifications of UAP. Alignment of tasks/activities requires the nurse to determine whether UAP has received appropriate training and been validated by an RN as competent. The delegating nurse needs to have access to individual UAP information to assure qualification and validation of competence prior to delegating the tasks/activities. In addition, the nurse needs to be knowledgeable of UAP job descriptions. Job descriptions would provide specific guidelines for tasks/activities that may be delegated as well as the education and training required. Nursing management and administration are responsible for ensuring a mechanism for validation of competence of UAP and making this information available to nurses for purposes of delegation. After verifying RN validation of competence of UAP, the facility/agency would need to establish policies and procedures that permit UAP to perform the tasks/activities. It is important to remember that although the facility/agency policy may permit UAP to perform specific tasks/activities, the nurse is responsible for using judgment and critical thinking to ensure appropriate delegation to UAP. Delegation is made on an individual client basis and is never an all inclusive decision (Fowler, 2010). The nurse administrator/manager is responsible for developing explicit policies and procedures that guide the nurse and UAP in delegation roles and responsibilities.

The next component of assessment to consider is the degree or amount of supervision required for UAP to perform the tasks/activities. The nurse is responsible for determining the amount of supervision and providing appropriate supervision/monitoring of the performance of the delegated task(s). In addition, the nurse is responsible for providing evaluation and feedback of UAP's performance of the tasks/activities (ANA, 2005). This requires the nurse to know the complexity of the task/activity to be delegated and amount of time available to supervise the performance of the task/activity. Too often, the busy nurse delegates tasks/activities to UAP with the erroneous supposition that those tasks/activities delegated are no longer his/her responsibilities but belong solely to UAP. This supposition occurred in the opening scenario when Regina, R.N., delegated the blood pressure check to Tara, NAI, but did not follow-up on the performance of the task within an appropriate timeframe for the client's status and nursing care needs based on the information received during shift report. Delegation of a task/activity to UAP does not relieve the nurse of the accountability of the performance and outcome of the task/activity. Accountability maintained by the nurse includes:

- supervision and monitoring UAP's performance of tasks/activities;
- ensure tasks/activities are performed in accordance with the standard of practice and facility/agency policies/procedures;
- tasks/activities are performed within a timeframe appropriate to the client's nursing care needs;
- the decision to delegate the tasks/activities to UAP;
- overall delivery of nursing care and the nursing process; and
- knowledge of what can and cannot be delegated.

The nurse cannot delegate assessment, decision-making, interpretation, and nursing judgment to UAP. Therefore, tasks/activities that require those components would not be appropriate for the nurse to delegate to UAP (Fowler, 2010).

## **Step Two: Communication**

Communication is the second step in the delegation process and is critical to effective delegation and the delivery of safe competent nursing care. Effective delegation requires on-going communication between the nurse and UAP. The nurse is responsible for providing clear instructions and guidance regarding the tasks/activities being delegated. Instructions should include:

- the tasks/activities to be performed,
- observations and client concerns that would need to be reported,
- unique needs of the client,
- priority for performing the tasks/activities, and
- required documentation (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005).

The nurse should use judgment in determining the amount and detail of information UAP would need to safely complete the delegated tasks/activities. After providing the delegation instructions, the nurse should evaluate UAP's comprehension of the instructions and performance expectations. A common delegation mistake made by nurses is the omission of ensuring UAP understand the delegated tasks/activities (Bitter & Gravlin, 2009). The opening scenario is an example of miscommunication in which Regina, R.N., did not provide the NAI adequate information about the concern and unique need of the client related to the fluctuations in his blood pressure. Nor, did Regina assist the NAI in prioritizing the delegated tasks so that the blood pressure check for Mr. Smith would be performed within an appropriate timeframe. Delegation requires mutual understanding and trust on the part of both the nurse and UAP to foster communication that is accurate, timely, and pertinent. UAP should be allowed to ask questions, seek clarification, and request additional training.

### **Step Three: Supervision and Monitoring**

Supervision/Monitoring requires the nurse to determine the degree or amount of supervision/monitoring/observation required for UAP to complete the delegated tasks/activities. The nurse provides oversight by monitoring UAP's performance of the tasks/activities and assuring compliance with standards of practice in accordance with facility/agency policies/procedures (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005). Supervision/monitoring may be in the format of direct or indirect oversight/observation. Direct supervision/monitoring would occur when the nurse is physically present on the premises or unit to provide oversight/observation. Indirect supervision/monitoring would occur when the nurse is not physically present but is immediately available by telecommunications and available to go to the clinical site if needed. When indirect supervision/monitoring of UAP are determined appropriate, the nurse is required to provide periodic direct supervision/monitoring. The degree and frequency of supervision/monitoring is a nursing judgment and must take into consideration all of the variables indicated in Step One – Assessment and Implementation. The nurse maintains the responsibility to intervene when nursing care is performed incorrectly, care is not completed in an appropriate timeframe, or an unexpected change in the client's condition occurs. RN responsibilities for supervision/monitoring include:

- accountability for coordination and delivery of nursing care to client or group of clients;
- provide appropriate supervision and follow-up of tasks/activities delegated;
- provide direct observation of clients and evaluation of the nursing care, and
- continuous availability to participate in nursing care as necessary [21 NCAC 36.0224].

LPN responsibilities for supervision/monitoring are limited to on-the-job assurance that the delegated tasks/activities have been performed appropriately and in accordance with standards of practice and the facility/agency policies/procedures [21 NCAC 36.0225].

### **Fourth Step: Evaluation and Feedback**

During the fourth step of Evaluation and Feedback, both the RN and LPN are responsible for the evaluation of UAP's performance of the delegated tasks/activities (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005). The evaluation by the RN would also include the effectiveness of the nursing plan of care, achievement of desired outcomes, modification of the nursing plan of care as needed, and success of the delegation process. Both the RN and LPN would provide appropriate feedback to UAP regarding the performance of the delegated tasks/activities. Feedback provides an opportunity for both the nurse and UAP to improve the delegation process and delivery of safe nursing care.

### **Tiered Delegation Process**

In many unit-based practice settings, the decision for delegation to UAP is made by a tiered process beginning with the nurse administrator, manager, or charge nurse from the previous shift. Often the delegation process is completed by multiple nurses in which the assessment and planning step is performed prior to the shift. The manager is responsible for establishing policies and procedures that specify tasks/activities that may be performed by UAP and the qualifications required. The unit clinical educator may

validate the competence of UAP, and the charge nurse may determine the staff schedule for delegation of tasks/activities for the upcoming shift. The nurse assigned to the clients is responsible for the delegation process of communication, supervision/monitoring, and evaluation of the performance of the task/activities. The nurse also maintains accountability for the decision to delegate and the provision of safe nursing care. When a change in the client's stability or condition occurs, the nurse is responsible for making clinical decisions regarding what should or should not be delegated to UAP. National Council of State Boards of Nursing (2005) cites the 5 Rights of Delegation as a framework to guide the nurse in using professional judgment and critical thinking to ensure appropriate delegation. The 5 Rights of Delegation are:

1. Right task – The task must meet all of the previously cited criteria and be appropriate to delegate.
2. Right circumstance – Delegation must be appropriate to the client population and practice setting.
3. Right person – The nurse must ensure the right task/activity is being delegated to the right person (UAP) and competence has been validated by an RN.
4. Right communication – The nurse must provide clear, concise instructions for performing the task/activity.
5. Right supervision – The nurse must provide appropriate supervision/monitoring, evaluation, and feedback of the performance of the tasks/activities.

Outlined is an overview of the roles and responsibilities for members of the delegation process:

**RN roles and responsibilities** include [21 NCAC 36.0224]:

- assess the client's nursing care needs and determine the plan of care before identifying tasks/activities to delegate,
- assess client care needs and UAP qualification to determine activities appropriate to delegation in the context of the practice setting and client population,
- assess and validate the clinical competence of licensed and unlicensed staff, initial and on-going,
- delegate nursing care tasks/activities to qualified personnel,
- provide appropriate supervision/monitoring of performance of care delivered,
- evaluate UAP's performance of the tasks/activities and outcome of care,
- evaluate the nursing plan of care and modify as needed,
- provide feedback to UAP regarding performance of tasks/activities and the delegation process,
- be accountable for nursing care provided by personnel to whom activities/tasks have been delegated, and
- communicate tasks/activities that may be appropriate to delegate to UAP in the nursing plan of care.

**LPN roles and responsibilities** include [21 NCAC 36.0225]:

- under the supervision of the RN, delegate specific nursing tasks/activities to UAP after the RN's assessment of the client and according to the nursing plan of care,
- ensure qualifications of UAP have been validated by an RN prior to delegation of tasks/activities,
- ensure RN supervision is continuously available to the LPN, on-site or off-site as appropriate,
- provide appropriate supervision/monitoring of the performance of the tasks/activities,
- evaluate UAP's performance of the tasks/activities and provide feedback, and
- be accountable for care provided by self and other personnel to whom tasks/activities have been delegated.

**UAP roles and responsibilities** include:

- accountable for accepting and performing tasks correctly and according to facility/agency policies and procedures;
- to be competent in the performance of the task and understand the delegation;
- refuse tasks that are beyond his/her knowledge, skills, competence, and not within facility/agency policy (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005);

- request assistance or training in performing a task when necessary; and
- inform and maintain ongoing communication with the nurse.

**RN administrator/manager roles and responsibilities** include [21 NCAC 36.0224 (i) (j)]:

- identify, develop, implement, and update standards, policies, and procedures that relate to and promote the delivery of effective nursing care;
- define the levels of accountability and responsibility, and indicate through policy and procedure the nursing tasks/activities that may be appropriate to delegate to UAP;
- ensure the provision of training for UAP specific to responsibilities and client population being served (Ballard & Gould);
- establish mechanisms for validation of qualifications, knowledge, and skills of nurses and UAP, and for on-going validation of competence;
- documentation of staff competencies and ensuring the nurse has access to the competency information related to the delegation of care (American Nurses Association, 2005);
- ensure appropriate staffing skill mix, numbers, and qualifications to promote the delivery of safe effective nursing care;
- cultivate unit environments that support staff in the delegation process and are conducive to teamwork (Potter, Deshields, & Kuhrik, 2010);
- provide educational opportunities for nurses and UAP regarding delegation, and
- be accountable for planning and evaluating the nursing care delivery system including assessment, supervision/monitoring, validation of competence, and communication of both nurses and UAP competence related to the delegation process.

### **Potential Violation of the Nursing Laws and Rules**

The mission of the BON is to protect the public by regulating the practice of nursing for LPNs, RNs, and advanced practice nurses. The majority of nurses are competent individuals who provide safe client care. However, incidents may occur in which the nurse has exhibited behavior or performed activities that are a violation of nursing laws and rules, which may result in disciplinary action by the BON. The potential nursing law and rule violations pertaining to delegation are [21 NCAC 36.0217]:

- failure to provide supervision of personnel who practice only under the supervision of the nurse and/or licensed professional;

this violation occurs when the nurse does not provide appropriate supervision and monitoring of the performance and outcome of tasks/activities delegated to the UAP.

- inappropriate delegation or delegating responsibilities to UAP when the nurse knows or has reason to know the UAP is not qualified to accept or perform the activity/tasks.

An example of failure to provide supervision would be a situation in which the nurse considers the task/activity delegated to UAP as no longer his/her responsibility. The nurse does not provide appropriate oversight and assurance of performance of the task or evaluation of the care provided.

### **Case scenario:**

*The LPN working in a busy rehab facility, with supervision of an RN as required by nursing law, delegated to the NAI the performance of fingerstick glucose checks for 5 clients. As the end of the shift approached, the NAI reported to the LPN that Mr. Walker in room 4B was complaining of feeling dizzy and faint. Upon arrival to the room, the LPN found Mr. Walker confused and clammy. The LPN quickly performed a fingerstick blood glucose check and obtained the result of 45. The LPN provided a source of glucose according to facility protocol. The LPN then reviewed the client's glucose results for the shift and identified that the NAI had not performed any of the client's glucose checks for that shift.*

**What was the potential violation of nursing law and rules?**

The potential violation was failure to provide supervision/monitoring over persons who practice under the supervision of the nurse. The LPN did not provide appropriate supervision/monitoring/oversight to ensure the NAI had performed the delegated task of glucose checks. Further, the LPN did not evaluate the glucose check results within an appropriate timeframe needed for the client's nursing care. Instead, the LPN evaluated the glucose results at the end of the shift and after an incident had occurred.

**What were the LPN's responsibilities?**

The LPN was responsible for:

- providing supervision/monitoring/oversight of the delegated task of glucose checks to the NAI,
- ensuring the task was performed correctly in accordance with the standard of practice and the facility's policies and procedures, and
- evaluating the glucose test results within an appropriate timeframe for the client's nursing care needs.

**What were the NAI's responsibilities?**

The NAI was responsible for performing the fingerstick glucose checks correctly in accordance with the standard of practice and the facility's policies/procedures. The NAI was also responsible for communicating results to the nurse and keeping the nurse informed of the performance of tasks.

The other potential violation of nursing law and rules is inappropriately delegating responsibilities to UAP when the nurse knows or has reason to know the UAP is not qualified to accept or perform the activity/task. Some examples of inappropriate delegation of nursing care tasks/activities are:

- tasks/activities that require assessment, decision-making, judgment, and interpretation;
- tasks/activities that are not consistent with the criteria cited in the Rules for delegation;
- a task that requires too much nursing supervision (American Nurses Association, 2005);
- delegation of care to the UAP when the nurse knows the UAP cannot safely provide the task/activities;
- tasks/activities that are not within the facility/agency's policies and are beyond the knowledge, skill, and training of the UAP; and
- the wrong task to the wrong person for the wrong client (Kaernsted & Bragadottir, 2012).

**Case Scenario:**

*Terry, R.N., has 10 years of home health experience and currently works with a community home health care agency. One day as he was making a routine supervisory home care visit, the client's family requested that Jennifer, NAI, be permitted to administer the client's oral medications. The family stated that their previous home health care agency had allowed the NAI to give the client medications. Jennifer, NAI, readily stated that she had been a Med Tech and had experience administering medications in an assisted living facility. Based on the family's request and the NAI's experience, Terry, R.N., delegated to Jennifer, NAI, the task of administering the client's oral medications.*

**What was the potential violation of nursing law and rules pertaining to delegation?**

The potential violation was inappropriate delegation. The RN delegated to the NAI the task of administering oral medications to the client in the home care setting without utilizing the principles of delegation to guide his decision-making and determination of an appropriate delegation. The decision-making process should include whether other laws and rules as well as the employer's policies would prohibit the delegation. The employer's policies should prohibit the administration of medications by NAI

(UAP) in the home care setting based on the North Carolina Division of Health Services Regulation Home Care Licensure Rules.

***What were the RN's responsibilities and accountability?***

The nurse was responsible for knowing and complying with nursing laws and rules and employer policies. Nursing law and rules require the delegation task to meet all of the criteria outlined in the Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP (North Carolina Board of Nursing). Included in the Delegation Decision Tree is the requirement that the NAI be properly trained in performing the task/activity and be validated as competent by the RN. In addition, the nurse is required to know the job description of the NAI and qualifications required for the tasks prior to delegation.

***What were the NAI's responsibilities?***

The NAI was responsible for knowing and complying with her employment job description, the facility/agency's policies, and recognizing that Med Tech responsibilities in assisted living do not transfer to the home care setting. The NAI was responsible for speaking up and refusing the delegation.

**Promoting Effective Delegation**

Delegation that occurs in an environment of respect, trust, and open communication promotes teamwork and safe competent nursing care. Effective delegation depends not only on the nurse making appropriate delegation decisions, but also on the skills and abilities of the nurse delegating the task and UAP receiving the delegation (Saccomano & Pinto-Zipp, 2011). Nurses often lack the knowledge, skill, and confidence to provide effective delegation. Some nurses may choose to perform the tasks themselves rather than delegate to UAP for fear of UAP refusing the delegation (Kleinman & Saccomano, 2006). Delegation is an art and skill that needs to be developed through education, training, and practice. Education and training opportunities for nurses and UAP exist in new employee orientation sessions, staff development workshops, continuing education offerings, and preceptor/mentoring programs (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2005). In addition, the nurse would benefit from educational opportunities and practice sessions that focus on change of shift or hand off report, UAP delegation reports, and enhancement of supervisor skills (American Nurses Association, 2005). Nursing education programs are responsible for providing the basic curriculum foundation from which new nurses can develop effective delegation skills (Saccomano & Pinto-Zipp). Although, new nurses may have received the theory and principles of delegation in their nursing education program they have not yet developed the skill and confidence to implement it in the clinical practice setting. Therefore, employers of new nurses need to acknowledge this gap and provide opportunities to develop delegation skills. In like manner, UAP may need additional education and training for the performance of a specific task/activity, or lack the confidence in performing the task and would benefit from coaching by the nurse (Rachel, 2011).

Good communication skills are crucial to effective delegation. Both the nurse and UAP would benefit from education and training in communication and conflict resolution. The nurse must determine the appropriate amount of information to communicate to UAP to promote effective outcomes of care while at the same time acknowledging UAP workload especially when UAP are receiving delegation from multiple nurses. UAP would benefit from education and training in effective communication to enhance the ability to ask questions, clarify the task/activities being delegated, resolve conflicts, and provide appropriate feedback/follow-up to the nurse. Teamwork and partnerships between the nurse and UAP promote effective delegation and are developed through communication, integrity, and mutual respect.

**Conclusion**

Effective delegation promotes safe, competent, and cost effective nursing care while enabling the nurse to assume more complex nursing care assignments. The four steps of delegation principles serve as a

framework to guide the nurse in making appropriate delegation decisions. The nurse maintains the accountability/responsibility for the decision to delegate tasks/activities to UAP and for ensuring the outcome of the care delegated. Delegation is a skill that needs to be developed through education and practice. Good communication skills promote effective delegation and ensure quality care is delivered.

### **Reflection:**

Let's reflect on the opening scenario with Regina, R.N., and explore the answers to the questions posed:

#### ***What were the nurse's responsibilities?***

The nurse's responsibilities were to:

- communicate clear, concise information to the NAI regarding the delegation of the blood pressure check,
- supervise/monitor to assure the task was performed correctly in accordance with the standard of practice and agency policies/procedures,
- assure the task was performed within a timeframe consistent with the client's nursing care needs, and
- assist the NAI in prioritizing the performance of tasks/activities especially in situations in which the NAI is receiving delegation from multiple nurses.

The nurse always maintains responsibility for the overall provision of nursing care for the client and for evaluation of the performance of tasks/activities delegated to UAP, in this case the blood pressure results.

#### ***What were the NAI's responsibilities?***

The NAI's responsibilities were to:

- perform the task correctly according to the standard of practice and the facility's policies/procedures,
- perform the task within an appropriate time frame for the client's nursing care needs, and
- question and clarify any delegations that were unclear.

#### ***What went wrong in the delegation process and how could this incident have been prevented?***

A communication breakdown occurred between the nurse and the NAI in the delegation process. The incident could have been prevented had the nurse taken the time to provide clear delegation instructions to the NAI prior to beginning shift responsibilities. During the delegation report the nurse would have communicated to the NAI, the importance of obtaining the blood pressure reading for Mr. Smith because of the fluctuations in his blood pressures readings during the night. This in turn, would have assisted the NAI in prioritizing the delegated tasks. Another strategy that would have prevented communication breakdown was for the nurse to validate the NAI's understanding of the need for an immediate blood pressure reading. Lastly, instead of realizing that the blood pressure reading had not been performed 55 minutes into the shift when the client was symptomatic, the nurse should have provided appropriate supervision/monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the task within a timeframe consistent with the client's nursing care needs.

### **Now it's Your Turn**

Read the following scenario and reflect upon the knowledge gained and information provided by this article to answer the questions.

*Monique, R.N., was working a 7pm to 7am shift at an in-patient hospice setting. She was performing a complex dressing change on a client when the NAI entered the room to notify her that Mrs. Manning in Room 6 "needed something" for pain. Monique, R.N., asked the NAI if the client requested the pain medication. The NAI responded, "No, but she is groaning and complaining of back pain." The RN asked the NAI to retrieve Mrs.*

Manning's medication administration record (MAR). After reviewing the MAR, Monique, R.N., instructed the NAI to withdraw two Tylenol Extra-strength tablets from the medication cart. The NAI withdrew the two tablets and returned to Monique, R.N., for verification. Monique, R.N., verified that the two tablets were Tylenol Extra-strength. She then directed the NAI to crush the tablets, mix them with applesauce, and give to Mrs. Manning.

**What was the potential violation of nursing laws and rules?**

**What were the RN's responsibilities?**

**What were the NAI's responsibilities?**

**Additional reference materials available on the Board of Nursing website at [www.ncbon.com](http://www.ncbon.com)**

- Nursing Law: select "Law and Rules", then select "Nursing Practice Act".
- Nursing Administrative Code (Rules): select "Law and Rules", then select "Administrative Code-Rules".
- NC Board of Nursing Position Statements: select "Practice", select "Position Statements", and then select the following –
  - Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP
  - Delegation and Assignment of Nursing Activities
  - Delegation of Immunization Administration to UAP
  - Delegation: NAI Credentialed as Advanced EMT/Paramedic
- NAI and NAI Task Lists: select "Practice", select "NA", select "Tasks", then select –
  - NAI Task List
  - NAI Task List

## References

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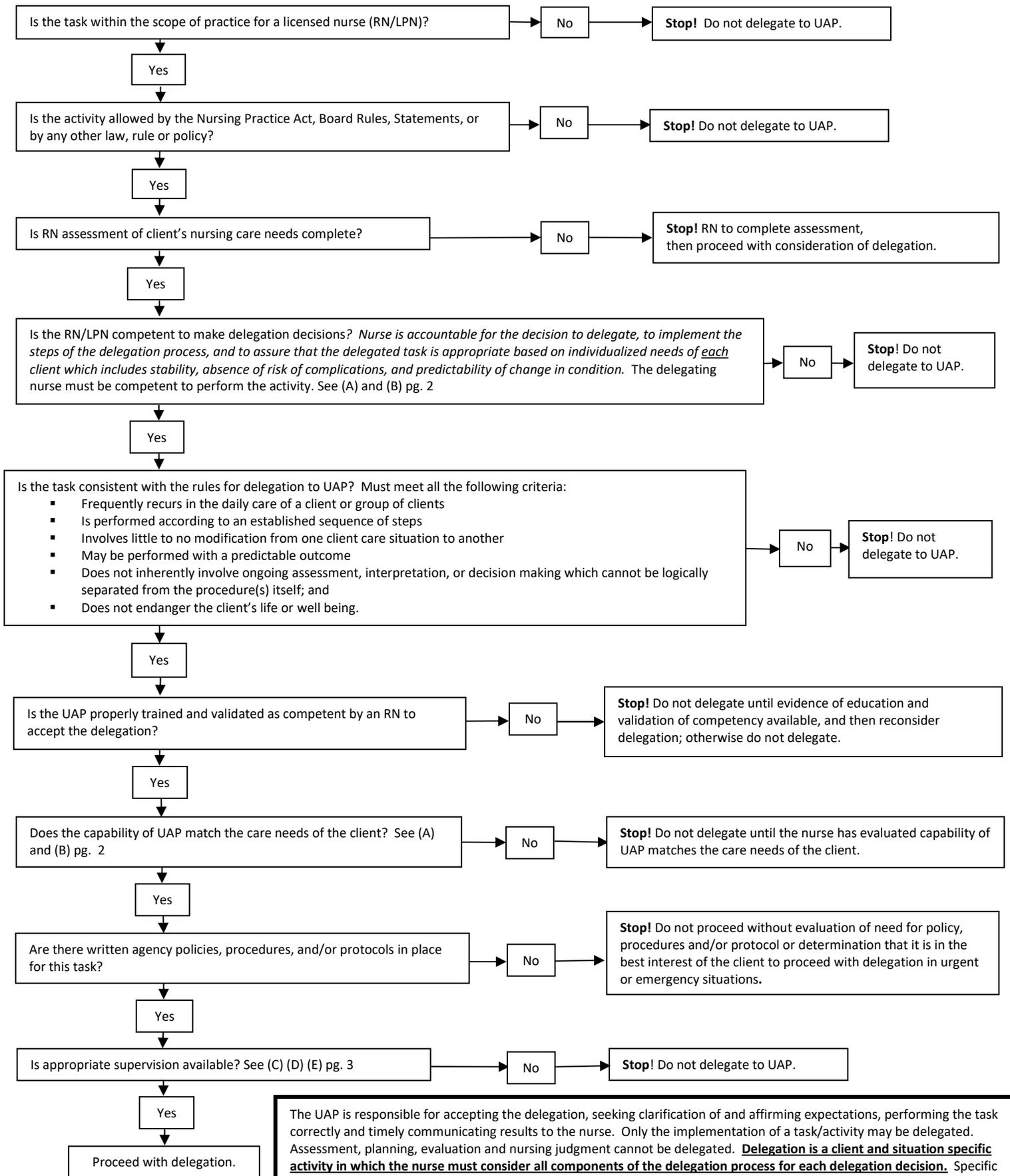
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## Step 1 of 4: Assessment and Implementation



The UAP is responsible for accepting the delegation, seeking clarification of and affirming expectations, performing the task correctly and timely communicating results to the nurse. Only the implementation of a task/activity may be delegated. Assessment, planning, evaluation and nursing judgment cannot be delegated. **Delegation is a client and situation specific activity in which the nurse must consider all components of the delegation process for each delegation decision.** Specific direction by the nurse (RN, LPN) to UAP when assisting the nurse with a task or nursing activity and under the direct visual supervision of the nurse is not considered delegation.

**COMPONENTS FOR DELEGATION TO UAP**

**Prior to proceeding to Step 2, consider the following:**

Delegation is a process of decision-making, critical thinking and nursing judgment. Decisions to delegate nursing tasks/activities to UAP are based on the RN’s assessment of the client’s nursing care needs. The LPN may delegate nursing tasks/activities to UAP under the supervision of the RN. Additional criteria that must be considered when determining appropriate delegation of tasks include, but are not limited to:

<p><b>(A) Variables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and skill of UAP</li> <li>• Verification of clinical competence of UAP</li> <li>• Stability of the client’s condition which involves predictability, absence of risk of complication, and rate of change</li> <li>• Variables specific for each practice setting:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The complexity and frequency of nursing care needed by a given client population</li> <li>• The proximity of clients to staff</li> <li>• The number and qualifications of staff</li> <li>• The accessible resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Established policies, procedures, practices, and channels of communication which lend support to the types of nursing activities being delegated, or not delegated, to UAP</li> </ul>	<p><b>(B) Use of critical thinking and professional judgment for The Five Rights of Delegation:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Right Task – the task must meet all of the delegation criteria</li> <li>2. Right Circumstance – delegation must be appropriate to the client population and practice setting</li> <li>3. Right Person – the nurse must be competent to perform the activity and to make delegation decisions, the nurse must ensure the right task is being delegated to the right person (UAP) and competence has been validated by an RN, and the delegation is for the individualized needs of the client</li> <li>4. Right Communication – the nurse must provide clear, concise instructions for performing the task</li> <li>5. Right Supervision – the nurse must provide appropriate supervision/monitoring, evaluation, and feedback of UAP performance of the task</li> </ol>
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**Step 2 of 4: Communication - Communication must be a two-way process**

<p><b>The nurse:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses the UAP’s understanding of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Task to be performed and expectations of performance of tasks</li> <li>○ Information to report including client specific observations, expected outcomes and concerns</li> <li>○ When and how to report/record information</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Communicates individualized needs of client population, practice setting, and unique client requirements</li> <li>• Communicates and provides guidance, coaching, and support for UAP</li> <li>• Allows UAP opportunity for questions and clarification</li> <li>• Assures accountability by verifying UAP accepts delegation</li> <li>• Develops and communicates plan of action in emergency situations</li> <li>• Determines communication method between nurse and UAP</li> </ul>	<p><b>The UAP:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Asks questions and seeks clarification</li> <li>▪ Informs the nurse if UAP has never performed the task or has performed it infrequently</li> <li>▪ Requests additional training or guidance as needed</li> <li>▪ Affirms understanding and acceptance of delegation</li> <li>▪ Complies with communication method between nurse and UAP</li> <li>▪ Reports care results to nurse in a timely manner</li> <li>▪ Complies with emergency action plans</li> </ul>	<p><b>Documentation by nurse and UAP (as determined by facility/agency policy) is:</b></p> <p>Timely, complete and accurate documentation of provided care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facilitates communication with other members of the health care team</li> <li>▪ Records the nursing care provided.</li> </ul>
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## IMPORTANT COMPONENTS FOR DELEGATION TO UAP

**Step 3 of 4: Supervision and Monitoring** – The RN supervises the delegation by monitoring the performance of the task and assures compliance with standards of practice, policies and procedures. The LPN supervision is limited to on-the-job assurance that tasks have been performed as delegated and according to standards of practice established in agency policies and procedures. Frequency, level, and nature of monitoring vary with the needs of the client and experience of the UAP.

<p><b>(C) The nurse takes into consideration the:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client’s health stability, status, and acuity</li> <li>▪ Predictability of client response to interventions and risks posed</li> <li>▪ Practice setting and client population</li> <li>▪ Available resources</li> <li>▪ Complexity &amp; frequency of nursing care needed</li> <li>▪ Proximity of clients to staff</li> <li>▪ Number and qualification of staff</li> <li>▪ Policies, procedures, &amp; channels of communication established</li> </ul>	<p><b>(D) The nurse determines:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The amount/degree of supervision required</li> <li>▪ Type of supervision: direct or indirect</li> <li>▪ The Five Rights of Delegation have been implemented:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Right Task</li> <li>2. Right Circumstances</li> <li>3. Right Person</li> <li>4. Right Directions and Communications</li> <li>5. Right Supervision and Evaluation</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<p><b>(E) The nurse:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintains accountability for nursing tasks/activities delegated and performed by UAP</li> <li>▪ Monitors outcomes of delegated nursing care tasks</li> <li>▪ Intervenes and follows-up on problems, incidents, and concerns within an appropriate timeframe</li> <li>▪ Nursing management and administration responsibilities are beyond LPN scope of practice. To assure client safety, the LPN may need authority to alter delegation or temporarily suspend UAP per agency policy until appropriate personnel action can be determined by the supervising RN.</li> <li>▪ Observes client response to nursing care and UAP’s performance of care</li> <li>▪ Recognizes subtle signs and symptoms with appropriate intervention when client’s condition changes</li> <li>▪ Recognizes UAP’s difficulties in completing delegation activities</li> </ul>
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**Step 4 of 4: Evaluation and Feedback** – Evaluate effectiveness of delegation and provide appropriate feedback

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate the nursing care outcomes:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (RN) Evaluate the effectiveness of the nursing plan of care and modify as needed</li> <li>○ (LPN) Recognize the effectiveness of nursing interventions and propose modifications to plan of care for review by the RN</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Evaluate the effectiveness of delegation:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Task performed correctly?</li> <li>○ Expected outcomes achieved?</li> <li>○ Communication was timely and effective?</li> <li>○ Identify challenges and what went well</li> <li>○ Identify problems and concerns that occurred and how they were addressed</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Provide feedback to UAP regarding performance of tasks/activities and acknowledge the UAP for accomplishing the task</li> </ul>
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**References:**

G.S. 90-171.20 (7)(d) & (i) and (8) (d) [Nursing Practice Act](#)  
 21 NCAC 36.0221 (b) [Licensed Required](#)  
 21 NCAC 36.0224 (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (i) & (j) [Components of Nursing Practice for the Registered Nurse](#)  
 21 NCAC 36.0225 (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) [Components of Nursing Practice for the Licensed Practical Nurse](#)  
 21 NCAC 36.0401 (c) [Roles of Unlicensed Personnel](#)

American Nurses Association Decision Tree for Delegation by Registered Nurses, 2012  
 Joint Statement on Delegation ANA and NCSBN Decision Tree for Delegation to Nursing Assistive Personnel, 2019  
 National Council of State Boards of Nursing Decision Tree – Delegation to Nursing Assistive Personnel, 2005

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9/2022; Reviewed 2/2013, 9/2018