

# What is Considered Withholding from a Nursing Regulatory Perspective?



Have you ever been in a situation where you intended to communicate patient information, such as a critical lab result, to a provider, but got busy and forgot? Have you ever considered the importance of timely information exchange in healthcare and its impact on patient safety? The Nursing Practice Act (NPA) grants the North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) authority to regulate the practice of nursing in North Carolina. While the NPA is broad, rules and components further clarify the laws.

Specifically, North Carolina Administrative Code 21 NCAC 36 .0224 (f) for the registered nurse and 21 NCAC 36 .0225 (f) for the licensed practical nurse defines the reporting and recording requirements for all aspects of nursing care. The failure to disclose information can result in a violation of the NPA or Rules, potentially leading to board action. A recent study concluded that poor communication amongst healthcare providers is a significant contributor of patient safety events (Howick, et al., 2024). Nurses serve not only as caregivers but also as patient advocates, educators, and key members of the healthcare team.

## What constitutes crucial healthcare information?

Crucial healthcare information includes any clinical or situational data that may impact a patient's treatment plan or the provider's decision-making process. Some examples of crucial information that should be shared include changes in a patient's vital signs, a fall, critical lab values, or changes in a patient's mental status. These would warrant contact with the provider based on your agency's policy. It is crucial to understand and know how to access your agency's policies.

## Why does withholding occur and what is the impact on patient safety?

There are multiple reasons nurses might withhold critical healthcare information. These include workload demands, interruptions, not understanding the information's significance, assuming that the information has already been communicated or viewed in the medical record, and inexperience. The direct consequence of withholding crucial information is the risk to patient safety. Incomplete information can lead to misdiagnoses, incorrect treatments, medication errors, or delays in care. These omissions could result in preventable harm and, in severe cases, death. For example, a nurse working in the neuro intensive care unit fails to report a change in the mental status of a stroke patient who has now become drowsy, dismissing the change in condition as a side effect of a medication. It is later determined that the patient had an evolving stroke that required an emergency thrombectomy.



## Ethical and Legal Implications

The American Nurses Association's (ANA) Code of Ethics states nurses are responsible for delivering competent, compassionate, person-centered care within their scope of practice (ANA, 2025, Provision 4.1, para. 1). Withholding vital information can violate these ethical principles. Nurses are accountable not only to employers but also to state boards of nursing and the law (Chesteron, et al. 2021).

## Prevention and Best Practices

There are strategies that individuals and organizations can take to help reduce the occurrence of withholding crucial information. For example, the standardization of reporting tools, such as the use of SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, and Recommendation), is beneficial during shift reports to help capture crucial information. A focus on teamwork skills, such as prioritization and organization of nursing tasks, may reduce pressures that lead to omissions (PSNet, 2019). Additionally, organizations that foster communication and environments of shared accountability are better equipped to improve systems in the workplace, by promoting Just Culture, leading to safer environments (Eng and Schweikart, 2020).

## Conclusion

In summary, nurses must be vigilant in monitoring their patients and communicating any significant changes to the appropriate healthcare provider. Withholding information can negatively impact clinical decision-making, patient outcomes, and team collaboration. Nurses must recognize the importance of timely communication as an essential part of their role and for continuity of care. Healthcare organizations, in turn, should support nurses through training, tools, and a Just Culture environment.

## Resource

North Carolina Board of Nursing. (2021). RN Scope of Practice-Clarification. [ps-rn-scope-of-practice-clarification.pdf](#)

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