



South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

South Carolina Board of Nursing

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Position Statement Assisting with Medications Formulated: January 1996

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The South Carolina Nurse Practice Act includes the administration of medication in the definitions for the practice of practical nursing and the practice of registered nursing (SC Code of Laws 40-33-20(47) and (48)). The administration of medications is defined as “the acts of preparing and giving drugs in accordance with the orders of a licensed, authorized nurse practitioner, certified nurse-midwife, clinical nurse specialist, or a physician, dentist, or other authorized licensed provider as to drug, dosage, route, and frequency; observing, recording, and reporting desired effects, untoward reactions, and side effects of drug therapy; intervening when emergency care is required as a result of drug therapy; appropriately instructing the patient regarding the medication; recognizing accepted prescribing limits and reporting deviations to the prescribing nurse practitioner, certified nurse-midwife, or clinical nurse specialist, physician, dentist, or other authorized licensed provider” (SC Code of Laws 40-33-20(4)). The statute further states in Section 40-33-42(C), “Subject to the rights of licensed physicians and dentists under state law, the administration of medications is the responsibility of a licensed nurse as prescribed by the licensed physician, dentist, other authorized licensed provider or as authorized in an approved written protocol or guidelines. Unlicensed assistive personnel must not administer medications, except as otherwise provided by law.”

It is the position of the Board that administration of medications is a critical nursing function based on the understanding of pharmacotherapeutics, biochemistry, and pathophysiology. In settings where licensed nurses are employed to provide nursing care to clients, the laws governing nursing practice preclude the licensed nurse from delegating administration of medications to unlicensed assistive personnel.

The Board recognizes that there are settings and circumstances where individuals must take medications to maintain their health status where the regularly scheduled presence of a nurse is not required. Often these individuals may need assistance with taking their medications.

Assisting an individual to take medication may include the acts of reminding the individual of the time to take the medication, opening the container that is properly labeled, or assisting the individual to place the medication in the mouth or properly apply the medication. In these settings, the designated caregiver may assist the individual with taking the medication.

- The Nurse Practice Act currently contains an exemption to the licensing requirement for administration of medications in cases of “gratuitous nursing provided by friends and family members of an individual; the incidental care of the sick by domestic servants or persons primarily employed as housekeepers as long as they do not practice nursing according to this chapter; [and] nursing assistance in case of an emergency” (SC Code of Laws 40-33-30(D)).
- Section 40-33-43 of the SC Code of Laws addresses the provision of medications in community residential care facilities.

- Board of Nursing Advisory Opinions 50 and 52 explain the role of licensed nurses in selecting, training, and determining the competency of unlicensed persons for assisting students with medications in school settings. This Position Statement on Assisting with Medications does not abrogate nor abridge the duties and practices outlined in Advisory Opinions 50 and 52.