VERMONT STATE BOARD OF NURSING

THE ROLE OF THE NURSE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF HOMEOPATHIC DRUGS, HERBAL MEDICINE PRODUCTS, AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

POSITION STATEMENT

**Question:** Under what circumstances may a nurse administer a homeopathic drug, herbal medicine product, or a dietary supplement?

**Definition(s):**

- **Homeopathy:** the practice of treating the syndromes and conditions which constitute disease with remedies that have produced similar syndromes and conditions in healthy subjects (US Food and Drug Administration)

- **Homeopathic drug:** any drug labeled as being homeopathic which is listed in the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States (HPUS), an addendum to it, or its supplements (US Food and Drug Administration)

- **Herbal medicine product:** a plant or plant part that people take to improve their health. These may be sold as tablets, capsules, powders, teas, extracts and fresh or dried plants (Medline Plus)

- **Dietary supplement:** a vitamin, mineral, herb or other substance meant to improve the diet. These may be sold as pills, capsules, powders and liquids. Supplements do not have to be tested in the way that drugs are tested (Medline Plus)

**Background:**

Many Vermonters use homeopathic drugs, herbal medicine products, and dietary supplements for health maintenance and treatment of medical conditions. These products are often available over the counter. These substances may be used as a type of complementary or alternative medicine.

Patients and families may ask a nurse to administer the products. The nurse may not have a provider order to administer the product. The nurse may not know how to access information about the ingredients, indications, dose, contraindications, interactions with drugs or other substances, or possible adverse effects of the products.

**Position Statement which Reflects Nurse’s Roles and Responsibilities:**

The Board believes that before the administration of any substance, the nurse must be aware of and have access to current valid information regarding the ingredients, indications, dose, contraindications, interactions with drugs or other substances, and possible adverse effects of the products.

Information on homeopathic drugs may be obtained from the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States or from other reliable sources. Information about herbal medicine and dietary supplements may be available from trusted sources such as the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine or National Institutes of Health Medline Plus website. If a health care provider has prescribed a drug or product, information may be available from the provider. If the medication or supplement has not been ordered by an authorized provider, the nurse should request that the patient/client’s provider verify in writing that the product is not contraindicated for the patient.

In making a decision whether or not to administer a product, a nurse may refer to the Vermont Board of Nursing position statement Determining RN/LPN Scope of Practice plus Decision Tree. A nurse has the right to refuse to administer substances. Refusal may be based on:

- Evidence that the substances may harm the client,
Inability to access adequate information regarding the substance,
Lack of approval from the patient/client’s medical provider, or
Facility policy that does not permit the nurse to administer the substance.

References/Citations:

Herbal Medicine, accessed on 2/27/2013 at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/herbalmedicine.html, the Medline Plus website of the National Institutes of Health

The Homœopathic Pharmacopœia of the United States, which may be accessed at http://www.hpus.com/

Medline Plus, which may be accessed at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, which may be accessed at http://nccam.nih.gov/


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This opinion is subject to change as changes in nursing practice occur.