Question: What are the responsibilities of a Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) when providing complementary and alternative medicine interventions?

Definitions:

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) interventions: The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) defines CAM as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine. Conventional medicine (also called Western or allopathic medicine) is medicine as practiced by holders of M.D. (medical doctor) and D.O. (doctor of osteopathic medicine) degrees and by other health professionals, such as physical therapists, psychologists, and registered nurses. The boundaries between CAM and conventional medicine are not absolute, and specific CAM practices may, over time, become widely accepted.

"Complementary medicine" refers to use of CAM together with conventional medicine, such as using in addition to usual care to help lessen pain. Most use of CAM by Americans is complementary. "Alternative medicine" refers to use of CAM in place of conventional medicine. "Integrative medicine" combines treatments from conventional medicine and CAM for which there is some high-quality evidence of safety and effectiveness. It is also called integrated medicine.

Types of complementary or alternative medicine include, but are not limited to:

- Mind and body medicine, such as meditation techniques, deep breathing exercises, guided imagery
- Manipulative and body-based practices, such as massage
- Other CAM practices such as movement therapies and energy field therapies.


Background

Complementary and alternative therapies are widely used by Americans, and many nurses incorporate these therapies in their practice. However, the safety and effectiveness of many CAM therapies are uncertain. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine conducts research and provides information about the usefulness and safety of CAM interventions.

Position Statement which Reflects Nurse’s Roles and Responsibilities

When deciding whether a particular CAM intervention is within an RN's or LPN's scope of practice, the nurse is encouraged to utilize the Vermont Board of Nursing’s “Determining Scope of Practice Position Statement and Decision Tree.” All requirements must be met, including appropriate knowledge, clinical skills, and demonstrated and documented competence.

An RN who utilizes or directs the use of CAM interventions is responsible for assuring that the chosen intervention is safe and appropriate to meet the nursing needs of the patient/client. Research-based information is available from NCCAM and other sources.

The RN is responsible for obtaining the patient/client’s informed consent prior to the intervention (see Vermont Board of Nursing's position statement “The Role of the Registered Nurse in Obtaining Informed Consent for a Treatment or Procedure”).

The LPN may provide CAM interventions as directed by and under the supervision of an RN, APRN, licensed physician or
References/Citations

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