

Understanding the Professional Practice Committee

CATEGORIES OF ISSUES AND CONCERNS

How it works

Professional Practice Committees (PPC) provide an avenue for the employer and employees to discuss strategies and/or solutions relating to professional issues facing nurses in their workplace. The Committee shall be advisory in nature and shall not substitute for staff or head nurse meetings or normal lines of communication in effect in the workplace.

Nurses may take concerns and/or problems to their local presidents, either at local meetings or through the Work Situation Report. In turn, the local president and Executive will review the issue and determine if it should proceed to the PPC, and if so, will table the issue with the Committee. This gives the PPC the opportunity to jointly address problems before they escalate.

Process for resolving issues

- Identify the issue/concern.
- Categorize your issue/concern.
- Channels of communication.
- Review available, relevant documentation.
- Where is the issue to be referred for discussion:
 - Example: 1) who is responsible
 - 2) who should be asked to attend the meeting
- What are the proposed solution(s)/resolution(s)
- Evaluate your progress on their issue

It is your Committee.
You can make it work.

Categories of Issues and Concerns

The various categories of issues which may be raised at the PPC include:

- Collective agreement issues,
- Policy issues,
- Professional issues, and
- Other issues.

It is a good idea to categorize the issue for your own clarification. Some issues cannot be placed into one category but overlap, for example, an issue can be about a policy and a practice matter.

Your Work Situation Reports can also be used to identify an issue. It is important to continually encourage nurses to use the Work Situation Report since these support nurses in resolving workplace issues.

PPC members should review the terms of their collective agreement regarding their committee.

Collective Agreement Issues

Committee members should be familiar with the terms of the collective agreement to be able to respond to the employer if any issue arises at a committee meeting.

Issues may arise under the collective agreement. Some matters will involve issues that can wait until a professional practice committee meeting is scheduled. Others may result in a grievance being filed before it can be discussed at the meeting.

The issues can be put on the agenda for a professional practice committee meeting. There are various reasons why a matter may require review at a meeting. There are issues which may arise and require review, but there is no time limit to discuss the matter, for example, if a grievance is not being contemplated. The local may have matters arise that relate to the interpretation of the collective agreement, but an issue has not arisen regarding the matter. As an example, perhaps an employer will raise that it is going to change the required qualifications for positions in a facility which results in only a few employees in the facility being eligible for any future postings. If there have not been any postings there would not be an issue to grieve, yet it is of concern to the local and relates directly to the matter of job postings under the collective agreement. At the professional practice committee meeting, the Union committee members can raise the issue and concerns with a goal of resolving the matter as the employee would be required to discuss the rationale for any change.

Some matters which are of an individual nature and may result in a grievance, for example, a job posting would be a matter that cannot wait until a meeting is scheduled because of time limits to file a grievance.

An issue may be broad or relate to one individual. If the issue is broad, it may still be discussed at the professional practice committee. If it is a matter which is specific to an individual, it likely would not be discussed at the meeting. **Although, if the local makes the decision to do so, they have the right to have the individual matter put on the agenda.** A change in qualifications may be seen as a broad issue as well as an individual issue if an employer changed the qualifications for positions in the facility but the local only became aware of the change when postings went up and an individual was denied a position.

On the other hand, the local may see issues arise on a job posting, for example, on recent job postings, which while not the subject of an individual grievance, may be of a concern to the nurses in your facility.

You may want to discuss the interpretation and application of the provisions of the collective agreement even though grievances are not being filed by members or the local.

Policy Issues

Policies which affect employees should be brought to the employees' attention. Employers are to ensure that policies which affect employees are made available to employees. This will ensure that employees are aware of a policy that impacts on them. The policy issues which may be referred to the committee may relate to policies, either written or verbal, which the employer has implemented.

Policies cannot be contrary to the terms of the collective agreement.

You may have a new policy being implemented which you believe needs to be reviewed to discuss whether the terms violate the provisions of your collective agreement.

If the policy does violate the terms of the collective agreement, you will want to discuss it with the employer to have it withdrawn or revised. If the employer does not agree, you may want to file a Union grievance on the matter. Even if a policy does not violate the terms of the collective agreement, you may have concerns regarding its application to nurses. Therefore, you can raise the matters at the professional practice committee meeting.

A new policy should be reviewed by the local to determine if it in fact violates any terms of the collective agreement. As an example, if the employer was to implement a policy limiting payment for overtime, this would be a violation of the collective agreement. On the other hand, the employer may implement a policy regarding procedures which is not a violation of the collective agreement but is still a concern to nurses. It can be discussed at the professional practice committee meeting.

Professional Issues

An issue of nursing practice is appropriate for discussion at professional practice committee meetings. This is an opportunity to review matters which have arisen, for example, a specific incident that has occurred. You may have concerns about something that may happen. This is also an area where an issue may overlap, in this case between practice and policy. If, for example, the employer has initiated a policy regarding practice and there are questions or concerns, it can and should be raised.

Other Issues

There may be issues that you cannot categorize as a collective agreement, policy or practice issue, yet they may require discussion. You are, because of the broad intention of the language, able to raise matters at professional practice committee meetings.

The language was intended to provide nurses making the presentation, through the local or on their own, the opportunity to put issues formally on the table which otherwise would not have had a place for discussion. The employer, by the language, is required to discuss matters. The employer may make attempts to subvert the committee or control the topics for the meeting. They may argue that a topic is not appropriate for discussion. It is important for you to recognize the broad nature of the topics which you have the right to present.

Your collective agreement is your authority for your rights and obligations. It is also where your right to a committee is outlined as well as the issues which can be raised. The issues to be raised are intentionally broad to allow you the right to discuss a range of issues not just matters under the collective agreement.

Issues to document and forward to the PPC

- Understaffing
- Nurses working alone
- Staff not replaced when on sick leave, vacation, leave of absence, days off, etc.
- Lack of orientation
- Availability of casuals
- Staff working in areas where they are not entirely comfortable or not orientated to
- No coverage for coffee breaks and meal breaks
- Increased overtime, often unclaimed as such
- High staff turnover
- Work left over from one shift to another
- Increased pace of work
- Patient complaints
- Decreased assessment time for patients
- Decreased time for patient teaching and interaction with patient and family
- Increased focus on tasks (such as paperwork) rather than care
- Increased acuity of illness
- Lack of supplies on nights and weekends
- Decrease in nursing hours per patient as a result of a workload measurement system that is confusing and does not reflect the reality of patient acuity and patient needs
- Increase in number of incident reports due to errors and mistakes
- Lack of ability to deal with problem patients
- Increase in infection rates
- Increased assignment of non-nursing duties
- Decrease in number of support staff
- Insufficient policies and procedures
- Lack of consultation with staff by management
- Changing staff structure
- Work environment
 - Co-workers
 - Management
 - Physicians
 - Patients
- Accommodating disabled employees
- Number of grievances
- Increase in long-term disability and Workers' Compensation claims
- Occupational health issues
- Increased utilization of sick leave
- Increased number of Work Situation Reports
- Impact of stress and burnout on morale