



Disciplinary Sanctions for Fraud, Theft, and Deception

The Texas Board of Nursing (Board), in keeping with its mission to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, believes it is important to take a strong position regarding the licensure of individuals who have engaged in dishonest behaviors that may place the public or patients at risk. The Board is concerned with individuals who have stolen or misappropriated property, money, or other possessions from patients, who have engaged in fraudulent behavior towards patients, who have engaged in fraud towards government programs or funds, e.g., Medicare and/or Medicaid, or who have been convicted or received a judicial order involving a crime or criminal behavior of theft or deception to an extent that such conduct may be repeated in connection with the individual's practice of nursing with patients who are vulnerable, thereby affecting the nurse's ability to safely care for patients. Furthermore, the Board's policy is consistent with and supports the Governor's Executive Order RP36 dated July 12, 2004, relating to preventing, detecting, and eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse that can be found at: www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/exorders/rp36.

The Board's position applies to all nurse license holders and applicants for licensure.

The Board adopts the following assumptions as the basis for its position:

1. Patients* under the care of a nurse are vulnerable by virtue of illness or injury, and the dependent nature of the nurse-patient relationship.
2. Persons who are especially vulnerable include the elderly, children, the mentally ill, sedated and anesthetized patients, those whose mental or cognitive ability is compromised and patients who are disabled or immobilized.
3. Patients frequently bring valuables (medications, money, jewelry, items of sentimental value, checkbook, or credit cards) with them to a health care facility.
4. Nurses frequently provide care in private homes and home-like settings where all of the patient's property and valuables are accessible to the nurse.
5. Nurses frequently provide care in settings without direct supervision.

The Board considers the following behaviors important in evaluating whether an individual possesses the integrity and honesty to practice nursing:

1. Theft from a patient raises serious concerns whether the nurse can be trusted to respect a patient's property/possessions in the future.
2. Theft or deception that occurs outside of the workplace, including conviction or a judicial order involving criminal behavior, may raise concerns as to whether the same misconduct will be repeated in the workplace and, therefore, place patients at risk for theft and deception.

* The terms "resident" or "client" are often substituted for the term "patient" in health care facilities. For the purposes of this document "patient" includes all of these terms.

Crimes Related to Fraud, Theft, and Deception

Fraudulent behavior is a crime of moral turpitude. The Board may rely solely on the conviction of a crime or probation for a crime, with or without an adjudication of guilt, to deny, suspend, limit, or revoke a license. Criminal conduct involving fraud, theft, and/or deception may also reflect a lack of good professional character (Section 213.27 of 22 Texas Administrative Code). In addition, the Board is also concerned with fraud involving government funds or programs, such as Medicare or Medicaid. This type of fraud increases the price employers pay for worker's compensation, drains the unemployment insurance fund, and steals from those in need of vital Medicaid and/or Medicare services. A conviction or a judicial order involving the criminal behaviors of fraud, theft, falsification or deception is a concern to the Board but may not in and of itself disqualify a person from licensure.

The magnitude of the behavior is not necessarily a major factor the Board will consider. Factors related to the crime that would concern the Board the most are evidence of premeditation, lack of remorse, and failure to pay restitution. The presence of these factors is evidence to the Board that the likelihood of the same behavior being repeated is great enough that patients may be at risk for the same conduct. Acts of an impulsive nature where there is insight/remorse regarding the conduct may be mitigating factors for the Board to consider. The criminal behavior of fraud, theft, or deception will be evaluated on an individual basis considering the foregoing factors.

It should be noted that if a nurse is imprisoned following a felony conviction, felony community supervision revocation, revocation of parole, or revocation of mandatory supervision for a crime involving fraud, theft, or deception, the Board shall revoke the nurse's license, regardless of the conduct associated with or the circumstances surrounding the crime. Chapter 53 of the Texas Occupations Code and 22 Texas Administrative Code Section 213.28 governs the consequences of criminal convictions and requires revocation of a nurse's license if there is imprisonment as stated above. Section 213.27 of 22 Texas Administrative Code is also applicable to criminal conduct. Acts of fraud, theft, or deception will preclude a nurse from working in a home health or independent setting during the stipulation period. If circumstances do not warrant removal from that practice setting, supervision in the home health or independent setting will be required. Discipline by the Board will likely require the nurse to pay a civil penalty or fine and restitution as authorized by the Nursing Practice Act and Board rules. The Board will take under consideration any conviction or conduct that falls within the "youthful indiscretion" factors as stated in Board rules (Section 213.28 of 22 Texas Administrative Code), factors stated in Texas Occupations Code chapter 53 regarding criminal conviction consequences, and other factors in Sections 213.27 and 213.28 of 22 Texas Administrative Code (Good Professional Character and Licensure of Persons with Criminal Convictions).

Theft from a Patient

Theft from a patient or engaging in fraudulent or deceitful behavior or conduct with or involving a patient is never acceptable. Theft of patient money, property, medicine, valuables, or items of sentimental value is ground for suspension or revocation of licensure.

A license may be denied if the applicant engaged in theft while functioning in the role of a care giver. Other fraudulent conduct or deception towards a patient is unacceptable, but not necessarily a disqualification from licensure. These cases will be considered on an individual basis and may be disciplined at a level less than revocation or may be reprimanded or warned and limited from independent settings following a thorough investigation. Factors such as insight, remorse and premeditation will be considered as to whether a disciplinary sanction is imposed. The Board believes that employers of nurses have the responsibility to have safeguards in place to ensure that patients are not subjected to acts of fraud, theft, or deception.

Theft from the Workplace

Theft is an intentional act regardless who is the victim of the theft. The Board's position on theft from an employer is not as strong as its position on theft from a patient. However, if a nurse engages in fraud, theft, or deception toward his/her employer, there is the possibility that the nurse will also engage in the same behavior towards patients. The Board will consider the factors of premeditation, remorse and restitution as well as the steps taken by the employer toward the nurse in deciding whether or not discipline should be imposed.

Petition for Reinstatement

A person who has been denied licensure or whose license has been revoked has the right to petition the Board for reconsideration or reinstatement after one year has elapsed. The burden of proof that the person does not pose a danger for fraud, theft, or deception toward patients remains with the petitioner or applicant.

Recommended Sanctions

The minimum allowed sanction for fraud, deceit, intentional, and/or willful misconduct that results in harm or the potential for harm to another person will be removal from practice in an independent setting, including but not limited to home health and agency nurse, practice under the supervision of another registered nurse, if practicing as a RN, or under the supervision of a licensed vocational nurse or registered nurse, if practicing as a LVN, employer reports, and a punitive fine. The recommended sanction may be revocation.

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