



**MEDLINE  
UNIVERSITY**

**LEADERSHIP:  
PROTOCOLS**



## PROTOCOLS

Nursing protocols act as a step by step guide to nurses in providing treatment and care to patients, providing standardization of processes and procedures for the entire staff to follow. Usually drafted by a protocol committee and signed by a physician, nursing protocols normally address medication administration, assistance with daily activities and mobility, wound care, dietary modifications and pain management. Nurses in a medical setting are required to sign off annually on protocols relevant to their work responsibilities.

Protocols are documented in writing and must be easily accessible to nursing employees. They must comply with state regulations, policies and legislature and be cost-effective. Be sure to continually update and modify to practice standards around current research and clinical findings.

An easy way to think of a protocol is as a step by step detailed instruction sheet on how to perform a specific task or procedure that defines techniques and procedures of treatment. Each protocol should address only the skills and treatment of that particular provider's scope of practice. A nursing protocol will include details on care and treatment and procedures permitted under their scope of practice, whereas an administrative or physician protocol would include different steps or details. Protocols are normally organized into categories or specialties.

Beyond the detailed steps on performing the procedure or task, protocols often include reference pictures demonstrating the prescribed techniques. Include lists that detail equipment and supplies needed to perform the tasks of care, as well as treatment contraindications, tips and recommendations. Protocols for risky procedures may also include warnings or cautions.

### The Three Parts of a Protocol

Protocols are usually developed in three parts. The first part defines the condition. This concise section defines the specific details of the condition or procedure. It includes etiology, which describes the causes and contributing factors, and is both subjective and objective in detailing history/symp-

toms and physical findings or lab tests. A clinical assessment is also included in this step.

The second section of the protocol defines the nursing plan and is divided into Diagnostic Studies, Therapeutic, Follow-up, and Counseling. The third and final section includes supportive references. These are normally published references such as clinical/scientific studies or journal articles.

### After the Protocol is Written

Once developed, protocols should be tested within the facility prior to implementation. This will assure that the protocols are correct and appropriate, while also allowing the opportunity to make changes or improvements prior to implementation. Testing of protocols can be done with computer simulation, training, mannequins or with staff volunteers. Always check to make sure details such as medication dosages are correct prior to executing any new protocol.

After protocol development and testing, conduct staff meetings to review and discuss the protocols at length, being sure that all staff questions and concerns are thoroughly addressed. Following the meetings, schedule intensive training to give staff ample opportunities to practice the new or updated techniques and procedures. After completing the training but before implementation, administer testing to determine the staff's knowledge and usage of the protocols. Finally, ensure that thorough protocol training is included in new hire orientation so that all incoming staff members have a complete knowledge of the protocols that apply to their scope of practice.

#### References

1. Nursing Protocols. Available at: <http://biotech.law.lsu.edu/books/aspn/Aspen-Nursing.html>. Accessed May 1, 2014.
2. Shaping Public Health Nursing Practice: A Policy Development Kit. Available at: <http://ssp.wi.gov/files/ssp/pdf/snpolicy/toolkit.pdf>. Accessed May 1, 2014.