

Dear Student,

As a student nurse preparing for a career in the healthcare field, it is important to understand your work environment. It is also essential to be aware of laws that are in place to protect your health and safety.

As outlined in the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) Best Practice Guideline entitled Workplace Health, Safety and Well-being of the Nurse (RNAO, 2008), as a student nurse and soon to be Registered Nurse you are going to work in environments that “often contain biological, chemical, physical and psychological hazards”.

For example, consider having to reposition a client to change a dressing. You are taught to consider the needs of the client. For example, you will think about aseptic technique, privacy and pain management. What about your safety? Can you move the client on your own? Do you need assistance? Have you been trained to use the lift in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions? Have you considered client aggression

Some of these hazards are easier to control than others. There are products available such as e.g. personal protective equipment, which will aid in protecting you from biological and chemical hazards when used correctly. For example, there are times when an N95 respirator is required and other times when a regular mask is appropriate. Have you been fitted and do you know which protection is appropriate in the circumstances?

Psychological hazards are becoming increasingly common within the health care field. It is important to understand that bullying and horizontal violence should not be tolerated in any workplace setting. Nurses must respect and care for each other to maintain safety within their workplace. It is also of key importance to understand that administrators, educators and leaders must deal with workplace violence and safety issues and establish a zero tolerance environment where these hazards are concerned.

Understand that not only do you have a responsibility to the safety of your patients, but you also have a responsibility to the safety of yourself. Know your rights and responsibilities.

Yours sincerely,

BreighAnn Fairburn, RN, BScN  
Graduated December 2008

## **Interested in a Career in Occupational Health??**

Occupational Health Nurses work in a variety of settings. It is an ever-changing area of nursing in which, as a nurse, you are able to explore your own path and work very independently. Throughout your education you will be taught how to care for and understand your clients and their families. Occupational Health Nurses focus on caring for and protecting all employees.

Occupational Health Nurses understand the importance of health promotion, restoration and prevention of illness and injury as well as protection from occupational health and safety hazards. These nurses work with employees in the construction, industrial and health care sectors to ensure that their workplaces are safe.

If you want to learn more about the Occupational Health Nurses and the art of advocating for the employee, please refer to the RNAO Best Practice Guideline entitled, Workplace Health, Safety and Well-Being of the Nurse ...[click here to learn more](#).

Other links of interest include:

[Occupational Health Nurses Interest Group](#)

[Health and Safety Resources](#), i.e., Legislation, Safety Topics (Risks):