

Application of Code of Ethics Provisions by Travel Health Nurses

ANA's Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements is applicable for all nurses. The following discussion of the nine provisions clarifies its relevance to travel health nursing.

Provision 1: The nurse practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth and unique attributes of every person. (ANA, 2015)

The travel health nurse strives to assist the traveler to achieve maximum health and safety during and after international and domestic journeys. Travel health nurses provide care to travelers regardless of socio-economic status, immigration status, health status, culture, values, religious or spiritual beliefs, sexual orientation, language, race, gender or age. Every individual is treated with respect during the pre- and post- travel encounter. When assessing itinerary risks, travel health nurses have an ethical responsibility to have a clear understanding of travel-related health and safety risks of specific populations including, but not limited to, patients who are pregnant, pediatric travelers, seniors, immunosuppressed patients, patients with severe allergies and patients who return home to visit friends and relatives (i.e., VFR traveler). Travel health nurses set aside biases and prejudices with regard to the purpose of travel, timing of the pre-travel visit, destination choice, or planned trip activities. The basic ethical tenets of autonomy and informed consent are essential in providing individualized education and resources to mitigate travel-related risks that are often numerous and may include food and water pathogens, insect vector diseases, air quality threats, societal unrest and infectious outbreaks. The travel health nurse always supports the self-care agency of travelers and their right to self-determination as it applies to risk reduction interventions (immunizations, medications, referrals, change of itinerary). In the post-travel encounter, the travel health nurse withholds judgment regarding the circumstances of the post-travel illness or injury, and acts in the interest of the patient and other stakeholders in a caring and compassionate manner.

Provision 2: The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, community or population.

Travel health nurses are central to preparing travelers in a variety of circumstances: solo business travelers, families returning home to visit friends and relatives, researchers, mission and humanitarian workers, students traveling abroad, patients seeking international medical care and military personnel, among others. Increasingly, travel health nurses also evaluate and manage the care of the ill or injured returning traveler consistent with their scope of practice and applicable regulations. To assure the highest quality care, travel health nurses reject conflicts of interest and use evidence-based recommendations and interventions free of commercial bias. Travel health nurses prioritize not only individual patients, but also the broader population, utilizing a public health perspective to protect the communities both at home and abroad. Travel health nurses work to prevent future epidemics (e.g., advising patients to use insect precautions to circumvent infecting local vectors) and minimize the

spread of infectious diseases (e.g., instructing travelers to seek care immediately when they develop fever if at risk of malaria, viral hemorrhagic fever, MERS, avian influenza etc.; discouraging unvaccinated travelers from infecting local populations abroad with measles or other illnesses; and rapidly reporting communicable diseases to the appropriate authorities).

Provision 3: The nurse promotes, advocates for and protects the rights, health and safety of the patient.

During the pre-travel encounter, the role of the travel health nurse is to implement travel health consultations and raise awareness of health and safety risks related to international travel. Utilizing customized assessment tools and a variety of reliable resources (e.g., CDC, WHO, the Pan American Health Organization), travel health nurses conduct a thorough risk assessment of all aspects of the individual traveler and the trip, including the complete itinerary and planned activities. Travel health nurses then develop a customized plan encompassing evidenced-based personal safety measures, food and water precautions, insect precautions, appropriate vaccines, medications and a follow-up care plan to mitigate risks. The travel health nurse administers vaccines in a correct and safe manner, in accordance with CDC, state and institutional guidelines, having fully informed the patient and obtained consent. During a post-travel encounter, the travel health nurse ensures that returning travelers receive any appropriate follow-up care, including completing a vaccine series, triage or evaluation and management in the event of any rabies exposure, post-travel illness or injury. In addition, responsibility for the patient does not end with referral to a specialist team. The travel health nurse ensures that the transition of care is complete, and follows the patient to the extent feasible or possible throughout the healing process.

Provision 4: The nurse has authority, accountability and responsibility for nursing practice; makes decisions; and takes action consistent with the obligation to promote health and to provide optimal care.

Travel health nurses take responsibility for all aspects of their practice. Travel health nurses are knowledgeable regarding respective nurse practice acts, federal guidelines, and organizational policies, and the ANA Code of Ethics. They identify any unmet needs and ensure appropriate follow up. They coordinate with other health care team members and bring attention to any inconsistencies or outdated practices. In their care of the traveler and their interactions with colleagues, they adhere to the *Travel Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 3rd edition (2019)*. They keep current with frequent changes in global health patterns that impact their care, seeking information from only reliable sources, completing CE courses, complying with state, local and national regulatory bodies including those for nursing and public health. They regularly evaluate their care, and update their recommendations based on guidance from agencies, such as the WHO, CDC and ACIP.

Provision 5: The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence and continue personal and professional growth.

Travel health nurses may function in settings with unique risks to their health and safety. They may work abroad in limited resource settings or practice in clinics involving exposure to post-travel patients with infectious diseases, such as avian influenza, MERS or viral hemorrhagic fevers, such as Ebola. Moral distress occurs when travel health nurses encounter barriers to care or travelers who received pre-travel care inconsistent with U.S. standards. Travel health nurses must have the moral self-respect and courage to deal with these situations with patient education and advocacy and, as may be indicated, mandatory reporting or professional referrals in-country or abroad. Travel health nurses often collaborate in settings (e.g., universities, corporations, public health departments) that pose ethical dilemmas concerning the availability and extent of pre-travel services and the adequate financing of those services. Knowledge of state nurse practice acts, CDC travel health guidelines, current travel health research, and global illness and injury epidemiology enables the travel health nurse to demonstrate the expertise and leadership required to ensure comprehensive, quality care for every traveler. Expectations of others may exceed the travel health nurse's scope of practice and thereby jeopardize the health and welfare of travelers, colleagues and travel health nurses themselves. The travel health nurse maintains self-respect in terms of expectations for adequate orientation and training, time for counseling, access to necessary resources, and use of colleagues for collaboration. Travel health nurses have an ethical responsibility to follow evidence-based recommendations to maintain their health and safety both at work and outside the workplace.

Travel health nurses also must not fall prey to conflicts of interest that compromise character and integrity. They must not engage in personal or professional relationships that adversely influence the quality of care they provide. For example, they may not profit from recommending unnecessary vaccines or skewing research results. Travel health nurses carry the special burden of working in a rapidly changing field—daily updates are usually needed to track epidemiological changes in current outbreaks and emerging infectious diseases. Travel health nurses must seek information only from reliable sources, such as the CDC and WHO. They must avail themselves regularly of CE programs that focus on a variety of areas including tropical medicine, global health, climate change, epidemiology, immunology/vaccinology and pre-travel consultation and communication. Finally, travel health nurses ensure continued growth and development through participation in professional organizations such as ATHNA, ISTM and ASTMH.

Provision 6: The nurse, through individual and collective effort, establishes, maintains and improves the ethical environment of the work setting and conditions of employment that are conducive to safe, quality health care.

Travel health nurses, working in concert with other health professionals and relevant stakeholders, operate in a myriad of roles to promote ethics in the workplace and ensure high quality care. Travel health nurses are clinicians, academic researchers, educators, public health officials, executives and national, as well as international, policy developers. They participate in quality assurance activities, such as chart review, evaluation of services using outcome measures and patient surveys. They implement policies that prevent commercial interests, such as pharmaceutical companies, from adversely influencing their work. They develop and seek out evidenced-based interventions (e.g., ACIP vaccine recommendations). They work across disciplines and utilize the latest technological developments to

eliminate obstacles, improve access to care, eliminate inefficiencies, reduce costs and enhance quality of care.

Provision 7: The nurse, in all roles and settings, advances the profession through research and scholarly inquiry, professional standards development and generation of both nursing and health policy.

Travel health nurses advance the specialty by integrating evidence-based findings into practice, taking on projects, serving on committees and assuming leadership positions within their own organizations, as well as outside institutions. They initiate, promote and collaborate on research endeavors through academic institutions, professional societies and organizations, such as ATHNA, ISTM, ACHA, AAOHN, the U.S. armed forces and CDC. They work across disciplines, including tropical medicine, infectious disease, public health, pharmacy and veterinary medicine, to ensure that travel health nurses have a seat at the table to shape policies affecting their patients. They advocate at their workplace and in the public arena for improved care to international travelers utilizing the *Travel Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 3rd edition (2019)*.

Provision 8: The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health diplomacy and reduce health disparities.

Travel health nurses have an ethical responsibility to engage in activities that promote and protect the dignity and basic rights of all individuals. Health is a universal right and travel health nurses work every day to make it a high international priority. Travel health nurses collaborate across a wide variety of disciplines to promote health individually, locally and globally through institutional projects and committees, community action and consumer groups, as well as legislative and policy work. They give presentations, conduct research, teach and mentor colleagues, engage in legislative efforts and effectively utilize print, broadcast and social media to address concerns, such as addressing disparities in access to pre- and post-travel care; providing accurate and evidenced based information on immunizations; preventing and controlling infectious diseases and their responsible vectors; addressing the impact of climate change on global health and infectious disease, as well as world-wide accident prevention, especially the high rates of motor vehicle accidents; ensuring reproductive rights by providing safe and effective methods of contraception; and mitigating, to the extent possible, sexual assault, human trafficking, exploitation and travel concerns of vulnerable populations including, but not limited to, the LGBTQ community and travelers with disabilities or mental illness.

Provision 9: The profession of nursing, collectively through its professional organizations, must articulate nursing values, maintain the integrity of the profession and integrate principles of social justice into nursing and health policy.

Nurses have a long tradition of being formidable advocates for change, and nurses working collectively can be even more effective change agents. There is power in numbers, and travel health nurses working with their professional organizations to articulate nursing values and health priorities can improve the health and well-being of patients and communities worldwide.

The values of THNs are advanced broadly and communicated widely through ATHNA and its membership. This professional association serves as a conduit to maintain and further the integrity of the specialty practice. It works to align the guiding principles of evidence-based practice with those of social justice and integrate them into nursing policy. ATHNA provides travel health nurses with ready access to the latest clinical updates, courses and conferences, specialized standing orders and other online resources that support this effort. The association promotes personal and global health and safety, as well as research integrity, and regularly identifies and addresses weaknesses in travel health care delivery. ATHNA highlights the special concerns of specific populations of travelers to enhance the quality of care for all.

Travel health nurses serve as experts to guide decisions involving travel health care both in the United States and internationally. They establish education requirements, standards of care, health policy and national and international health agendas. Travel health nurses, acting through ATHNA, are strong advocates for the profession as illustrated by their recent success in convincing CDC to avoid using “travel health physician” in their publications, replacing this with more inclusive terms such as travel health “professional” or “clinician” to more accurately reflect the role of nurses as travel health experts.