



# Position Statement

## Informed patients

### ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) strongly believes that everyone has the right to up-to-date information related to health promotion and maintenance of health and the prevention and treatment of illness. Such health information should be easily accessible, timely, accurate, clear, relevant, reliable and based on evidence or best practice. Additionally, everyone should have access to accurate, reliable and transparent information on scientific research, pharmaceutical care and technological innovations in promoting health, preventing and treating illness.

People have a right to privacy and to confidentiality of information about their health. Appropriate sharing of information is a pre-requisite for nurses and other health professionals to establish honest, collaborative relationships with patients and their families or carers.

People are entitled to access to information, in an appropriate format and to the level of their understanding that enables them to make informed choices and decisions regarding their health. Information for patients and carers should be responsive to their needs and circumstances including their spiritual, religious, ethnic and cultural needs as well as their language skills and health literacy levels<sup>1</sup>. Risks and benefits of healthcare interventions and options should be explained to patients and, where appropriate, to their families and carers.

Nurses and other health professionals should work in partnership with patient organisations, self care groups and other interested parties to ensure that patients and the public have access to appropriate information about health and health services. Inherent in this is the expectation that nurses will be involved in research into the nature, quality and impact of patient information on health outcomes and nursing practice.

### Background

People who take an active role in their health make better-informed decisions on self-treatment, engage in healthier lifestyles and are more likely to be satisfied with their care and health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Nurses and other health professionals should acknowledge individuals' rights to make informed decisions and choices about how to manage their own health and to accept or reject health care or treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> Health literacy is defined here as the ability to understand, internalise and effectively use health information in everyday life.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health. Chronic Disease Management and Self-Care. National Service Frameworks. (2002). A practical aid to implementation in primary care. Expert Patient Programme. Progress Report. February 6, 2003.  
[www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/progress/expertpatient/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/progress/expertpatient/index.htm)

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Nurses and other health professionals need to have the knowledge and skills to manage information; to assist patients in accessing, managing and utilizing information; and to contribute to and assess the evidence base regarding the impact of informed patients on health outcomes.

They should respond to patient self-identified information needs and patient needs assessment, rather than rely solely on professional knowledge or pre-conceived ideas.

Information should be made available to patients/consumers using a variety of information and communication technologies and should be presented in accordance with recognised or agreed quality standards.

Initial and continuing education and training of nurses and other health professionals should provide them with the competencies necessary to ensure that patients and the public are well informed, and to work in partnership with them to better meet their health needs.

ICN acknowledges that informed patients are crucial for ensuring patient safety and should be part of the efforts to improve quality and safety of health care.

**Adopted in 2003**

**Reviewed and revised in 2008**

**Related ICN Positions:**

- Patient Safety
- Health Information: Protecting Patient Rights

**ICN Publications:**

- Patient Talk! The ICN Informed Patient Project (2003)

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.