



Conscientious objection

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing* have a right to refuse to participate in procedures which they judge, on strongly held religious, moral and ethical beliefs, to be unacceptable (conscientious objection).¹ Fear, personal convenience or preference, are not sufficient basis for conscientious objection.
2. In exercising their conscientious objection, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the person's preference, quality of care, safety, and advance care directives are not compromised.
3. Subject to their scope of practice, nurses and midwives in the course of their employment must not refuse to carry out urgent life-saving measures or procedures when there is no ability to safely hand over care.
4. In situations of conscientious objection, the nurse, midwife or assistants in nursing should express a desire not to participate in that procedure in advance, where possible. In these circumstances the employer must allow the nurse, midwife or assistants in nursing to leave the area and/or not participate in the procedure or the persons care as soon as practicable without any discriminatory or adverse action being taken.
5. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should give serious consideration to avoiding employment positions where they can foresee that a situation of conscientious objection may arise with relative frequency.
6. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a responsibility to inform their employer before accepting employment positions where they know they may be called on to frequently be involved in situations at variance with their beliefs.
7. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should support colleagues who exercise their right to conscientious objection in an endeavour to prevent them being placed in situations that may compromise their religious, moral and ethical beliefs.
8. Discriminatory or adverse action should not be taken against any nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing voicing a conscientious objection either in an application for, or during employment.
9. In health and aged care facilities nurses and midwives should have access to counselling and support services to meet their needs in their workplaces.

*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled).

Endorsed September 1994

Reviewed and re-endorsed November 1996

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Reviewed and re-endorsed June 2011

Reviewed and re-endorsed February 2015

Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2017

Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2020

Reference

1. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA). 1 March 2018. *Code of conduct for nurses and Code of conduct for midwives*. Available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Professional-standards.aspx>