

BOARD OF REGISTERED NURSING

PO BOX 944210, Sacramento, CA 94244-2100

P (916) 322-3350 | TTY (800) 326-2297 | www.rn.ca.gov



CONSCIOUS SEDATION/MODERATE SEDATION

It is within the scope of practice of registered nurses to administer medications for the purpose of induction of conscious sedation for short-term therapeutic, diagnostic or surgical procedures.

Authority for RNs to administer medication derives from Section 2725(b)(2) of the Nursing Practice Act (NPA). This section places no limits on the type of medication or route of administration; there is only a requirement that the drug be ordered by one lawfully authorized to prescribe. Other relevant sections of the NPA do impose additional requirements. Specifically, the registered nurse must be competent to perform the function, and the function must be performed in a manner consistent with the standard of practice. [Business and Professions Code 2761(a)(1); California Code of Regulations 1442, 1443, 1443.5.]

In administering medications to induce conscious sedation, the RN is required to have the same knowledge and skills as for any other medication the nurse administers. This knowledge base includes but is not limited to: effects of medication; potential side effects of the medication; contraindications for the administration of the medication; the amount of the medication to be administered. The requisite skills include the ability to: competently and safely administer the medication by the specified route; anticipate and recognize potential complications of the medication; recognize emergency situations and institute emergency procedures. Thus the RN would be held accountable for knowledge of the medication, and for ensuring that the proper safety measures are followed. As of 1995, safety considerations for conscious sedation include continuous monitoring of oxygen saturation, cardiac rate and rhythm, blood pressure, respiratory rate, and level of consciousness, as specified in national guidelines or standards. Immediate availability of an emergency cart which contains resuscitative and antagonist medications, airway and ventilatory adjunct equipment, defibrillator, suction, and a source for administration of 100% oxygen are commonly included in national standards for inducing conscious sedation. National guidelines for administering conscious sedation should be consulted in establishing agency policies and procedures.

The registered nurse administering agents to render conscious sedation would conduct a nursing assessment to determine that administration of the drug is in the patient's best interest. The RN would also ensure that all safety measures are in force, including back-up personnel skilled and trained in airway management, resuscitation, and emergency intubation, should complications occur. RNs managing the care of patients receiving conscious sedation shall not leave the patient unattended or engage in tasks that would compromise continuous monitoring of the patient by the registered nurse. Registered nurse functions as described in this policy may not be assigned to unlicensed assistive personnel.

The RN is held accountable for any act of nursing provided to a client. The RN has the right and obligation to act as the client's advocate by refusing to administer or continue to administer any medication not in the client's best interest. The institution should have in place a process for evaluating and documenting the RNs demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the management of clients receiving agents to render conscious sedation. Evaluation and documentation of competency should occur on a periodic basis.

Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) by virtue of advanced education and practice in their area of specialty have met requirements to administer safely the class of drugs in question.