



## **Differentiating the Roles of Regulatory Bodies and Associations for Health Professionals**

### **A Background Document**

The primary functions of a regulatory college and an association are different but there are areas of overlap. Both regulatory bodies and associations are interested in supporting registrants and members respectively to provide safe, competent and ethical care. Regulatory bodies are responsible for the regulation of professionals in the public interest. Associations speak on behalf of members to advocate for professional and public policy matters.

Self regulation is based on the premise that determining the qualifications required to practice safely and determining whether a particular professional is a competent and ethical practitioner is best done by other members of that profession. However, there is increasing concern by government and the public that professions are self interested and regulate considering the interests of their fellow professionals rather than the best interests of the public. This concern has led to a number of changes to the legislation governing regulatory bodies. For example there has been an increase in the appointment of members of the public to the Board and Committees of regulatory Colleges to ensure that the professionals act in the interests of the public. Changes have also been made clarifying and increasing the responsibilities of regulatory bodies to ensure the public is protected (for example requirements related to continuing competence and quality assurance). These changes reflect a trend that is international in scope.

#### **Regulatory Bodies**

A regulatory body for health professionals is mandated by government to regulate professionals in the interests of the public. Its role is to protect the public by ensuring that the professionals it regulates provide safe, competent and ethical care. Self regulation is a privilege granted by government. In some countries regulation is done directly by government rather than by the profession.

In August 2005 the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia (RNABC) became the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC). The government of British Columbia moved all regulatory bodies under the same legislation (Health Professions Act) and all regulatory bodies in B.C. are now named Colleges.

The mandate of CRNBC is the same as the mandate of all regulatory Colleges in B.C. and is found in the Health Professions Act in the duties and objects of the regulatory College (see the document *RN Network of BC Background Document* on the RN Network Website).

Responsibilities include such things as registration, continuing competence/quality assurance, standards of professional ethics, standards of practice, and inquiry and discipline. All of the College's authorities are directed at individual registrants.

Some regulatory bodies interpret their mandate narrowly and focus on registration, setting standards and discipline. Nursing regulatory bodies in Canada pay considerable attention to the issue of supporting registrants to meet standards. The mission of CRNBC is protecting the public through the regulation of registered nurses, setting standards, supporting nurses to meet standards and acting if standards are not met. Supporting nurses to meet standards may include such resources as practice consultation, education about standards, and the provision of libraries.

CRNBC does not have a direct mandate to intervene at the organizational level. However recognition of the importance of the practice environment on the practice of registered nurses can be seen in the following CRNBC commitment:

*To work with registered nurses, health organizations and other stakeholders to create and sustain practice environments that support safe, competent and ethical nursing care for the public (click on the About Us section of the CRNBC website for a full list of the CRNBC Commitments).*

## **Associations**

In contrast to the mandate of a regulatory body, the mandate of an association is determined by the members of that Association and therefore serves the wishes of the membership. Association-type functions are usually focused on advancing awareness of the contributions the profession can make in pursuit of better health care and policy planning. This work is carried out in a variety of ways. In nursing associations, this has typically included representing the nursing profession to promote the full participation of nurses in shaping health policy as well as public policy related to health matters, and building the knowledge tools and resources upon which such participation is made possible.