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ADVISORY OPINION # 38

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QUESTION: Is it within the role and scope of responsibilities of the registered nurse (RN) to perform needle decompression for tension pneumothorax?

The State Board of Nursing for South Carolina acknowledges that needle decompression is within the role and scope of responsibilities of the RN with special education and training in emergent situations to relieve tension pneumothorax. This procedure should be in accordance with standards of the Emergency Nurses Association, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Heart Association, National Flight Nurses Association and the Air-Medical Crew National Standard Curriculum.

Recognizing that this responsibility is considered an additional act of the RN and requires special education and training, the Board recommends that the nursing department of the employing agency complete a comprehensive literature review and consult with clinical experts and legal counsel prior to implementation. Training should include but not be limited to the practice standards named above. If the nursing department determines that implementation is in order, then appropriate written policies, procedures, and standing orders should be developed which specify qualifications, special education and training to include didactic and clinical competency verification components, and emergent conditions/specific patient situations wherein the RN is authorized to perform needle decompression for tension pneumothorax.

This statement is an advisory opinion of the Board of Nursing as to what constitutes competent and safe nursing practice.