

Virginia Board of Nursing

Guidance Document on the Practice of Conversion Therapy

For the purposes of this guidance "conversion therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts" is defined as any practice or treatment that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of any gender. "Conversion therapy" does not include counseling or therapy that provides assistance to a person undergoing gender transition or counseling or therapy that provides acceptance, support, and understanding of a person or facilitates a person's coping, social support, and identity exploration and development, including sexual-orientation-neutral interventions to prevent or address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices, as long as such counseling or therapy does not seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity in any direction.

In § 54.1-3007 of the Code of Virginia, the Board of Nursing is authorized to discipline a licensee for certain acts of unprofessional conduct, including:

5. Practicing in a manner contrary to the standards of ethics or in such a manner as to make his practice a danger to the health and welfare of patients or to the public;

Leading professional medical and mental health associations have issued position and policy statements regarding conversion therapy/sexual orientation change efforts, especially with minors. Such statements have typically noted that the use of conversion therapy has not been shown to be effective or safe, may be harmful to a patient, and is considered to be unethical practice.

The 2015 position statement from the American Academy of Nursing stated its support for the numerous professional bodies that have stated opposition to conversion therapy or sexual orientation change interventions. The Academy concluded that “reparative therapies aimed at “curing” or changing same-sex orientation to heterosexual orientation are pseudoscientific, ineffective, unethical, abusive and harmful practices that pose serious threats to the dignity, autonomy and human rights as well as to the physical and mental health of individuals exposed to them. Based on sound scientific evidence, its commitment to human rights and dignity, and its mission of promoting positive health outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals, the Academy concludes that efforts to “repair” homosexuality, by any means, constitute health hazards to be avoided and are to be condemned as unethical assaults on human rights and individual identity, autonomy, and dignity.”

Consistent with the established position of the Academy, the Board considers “conversion therapy” or “sexual orientation change efforts” (as defined above) to be services that have the potential to harm patients. Thus, under regulations of the Board, practicing conversion therapy/sexual orientation change efforts could result in a finding of misconduct and disciplinary action against the licensee, certificate holder, or registrant.