WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES



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Before the State Of Wisconsin Board of Nursing

In the Matter of the Disciplinary Proceedings Against Thomas L. Collins, R.N., Respondent.

FINAL DECISION AND ORDER Order No. _____

Division of Legal Services and Compliance Case No. 22 NUR 455

The State of Wisconsin, Board of Nursing, having considered the above-captioned matter and having reviewed the record and the Proposed Decision of the Administrative Law Judge, make the following:

<u>ORDER</u>

NOW, THEREFORE, it is hereby ordered that the Proposed Decision annexed hereto, filed by the Administrative Law Judge, shall be and hereby is made and ordered the Final Decision of the State of Wisconsin, Board of Nursing.

The rights of a party aggrieved by this Decision to petition the department for rehearing and the petition for judicial review are set forth on the attached "Notice of Appeal Information."

Dated at Madison, Wisconsin on the <u>12th</u> day of <u>October</u>, <u>2023</u>.

Member Board of Nursing



Before The State of Wisconsin DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

In the Matter of Disciplinary Proceedings

DHA Case No. SPS-23-0030 DLSC Case No. 22 NUR 455

Against Thomas L. Collins, R.N., Respondent

PROPOSED DECISION AND ORDER

The parties to this proceeding for purposes of Wis. Stat. §§ 227.47(1) and 227.53 are:

Thomas L. Collins, R.N. 1021 Pecan Crossing Dr., Apt. 3502 Desoto, TX 75115

Wisconsin Board of Nursing P.O. Box 8366 Madison, WI 53708-8366

Department of Safety and Professional Services, Division of Legal Services and Compliance, by:

> Attorney Julie Zimmer Department of Safety and Professional Services Division of Legal Services and Compliance P.O. Box 7190 Madison, WI 53707-7190

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On May 24, 2023, the Department of Safety and Professional Services, Division of Legal Services and Compliance (Department), filed a Complaint against Respondent Thomas L. Collins, R.N., alleging the following grounds to take disciplinary action against his privilege to practice nursing in Wisconsin: (1) failed to cooperate in a timely manner with the Board's investigation, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § N 7.03(1)(c); (2) departed from or failed to conform to the minimal standards of acceptable nursing practice, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § N 7.03(6)(c); and (3) failed to provide medically necessary items or services, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § N 7.03(6)(c).

The Department served the Notice of Hearing and Complaint upon Respondent by sending a copy to Respondent's last known address on file with the Department via certified and regular first-class mail, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.08 and Wis. Stat. § 440.11(2).¹

Respondent failed to file an Answer within twenty days from the date of service, as required by Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.09(4). The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) scheduled a telephone prehearing conference for June 26, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. Notice of the conference was sent to both parties with instructions that Respondent contact the ALJ no later than June 25, 2023, to provide his current telephone number. Respondent failed to contact the ALJ prior to the prehearing and failed to appear at the prehearing conference on June 26, 2023. The ALJ attempted to contact Respondent at a telephone number provided by the Department but was unable to reach him. The ALJ also attempted to email Respondent at his last known email address on file with the Department. Respondent did not respond to the email or attempt to contact the ALJ.

The Department moved for default based on Respondent's failure to file an Answer to the Complaint and failure to appear at the prehearing telephone conference, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code §§ SPS 2.14 and HA 1.07(3)(c). On June 26, 2023, the ALJ issued a Notice of Default against Respondent and ordered the Department to file a recommended Proposed Decision and Order by July 26, 2023. The Department timely filed its recommended Proposed Decision and Order.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Facts As Alleged in the Complaint

1. Respondent Thomas L. Collins, R.N., is not and has never been licensed as a nurse in the state of Wisconsin.

2. Respondent is licensed as a registered nurse in the state of Texas with multistate privileges pursuant to the Nurse Licensure Compact (Compact), having license number 810742, first issued on November 29, 2011, and currently expired/delinquent as of July 31, 2022.

3. Respondent's most recent address on file with the Department is 1021 Pecan Crossing Drive, Apartment 3502, Desoto, Texas 75115.

4. At all times relevant to this proceeding, Respondent worked as a traveling registered nurse for a healthcare staffing agency and was contracted to work as interim Director of Nursing at a nursing home in Sheboygan, Wisconsin (Facility), pursuant to the Compact.

5. On July 6, 2022, the Department received a complaint alleging that Respondent failed to properly flush Resident A's feeding tube. Case No. 22 NUR 455 was opened to investigate the complaint.

¹ The Department also emailed a copy to Respondent's email address on file with the Department.

6. During the night shift on May 28, 2022, Resident A, a male born in 1958, was connected to his feeding tube and fell asleep. When he woke up at 9:00 a.m. the next morning, he was still connected to his feeding tube and the administration pump alarm was sounding.

7. Respondent was responsible for Resident A's care that shift and did not disconnect his feeding tube until 10:00 a.m.

8. Respondent connected Resident A to the tube for his next scheduled feeding without flushing the tube with water.

9. At 12:00 p.m. on May 29, 2022, Respondent disconnected Resident A's feeding tube and administered his medications. At 1:00 p.m., Respondent started another tube feeding but did not flush Resident A's tube between feedings.

10. Respondent did not document any progress notes during the shift.

11. On May 29, 2022, the Facility removed Resident A from Respondent's care and ultimately terminated Respondent's contract.

12. On July 28, 2022, the Department, on behalf of the Board of Nursing (Board), emailed Respondent at his email address listed in NURSYS² (<u>collins.thomas74@yahoo.com</u>) requesting his response to the complaint. Respondent failed to respond.

13. On August 5, 2022, the Department emailed Respondent again at his email address listed in NURSYS requesting his response to the complaint. Respondent failed to respond.

14. On August 15, 2022, the Department sent a letter via U.S. Mail to Respondent at his mailing address listed in NURSYS (same address as in par. 3 above) requesting his response to the complaint. Respondent failed to respond.

15. On September 22, 2022, the Department sent a second letter via U.S. Mail to Respondent at his mailing address listed in NURSYS and emailed Respondent again at his email address listed in NURSYS requesting his response to the complaint. Respondent failed to respond.

16. On October 13, 2022, the Department sent a letter via certified mail to Respondent at his mailing address listed in NURSYS requesting his response to the complaint. On December 5, 2022, the Department received the certified mail receipt signed by Respondent indicating the October 13, 2022 letter had been delivered to him. Respondent failed to respond.

Facts Related to Default

17. On May 24, 2023, the Department served the Notice of Hearing and Complaint on Respondent at his last known address on file with the Department (same address as in par. 3 above)

²² NURSYS is a national database for verification of nurse licensure, discipline and practice privileges for RNs, LPN/VNs and APRNs licensed in participating jurisdictions, including all states in the Compact.

by both certified and regular first-class mail, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.08 and Wis. Stat. § 440.11(2). (Affidavit of Service, ¶ 3(a) and (b)).

18. Respondent failed to file an Answer to the Complaint.

19. After the expiration of the 20-day time period to file an Answer, the ALJ scheduled a telephone prehearing conference for June 26, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. Notice of the conference was sent to both parties with instructions that Respondent contact the ALJ no later than June 25, 2023, to provide his current telephone number. Respondent failed to contact the ALJ.

20. Respondent failed to appear at the prehearing conference on June 26, 2023. The ALJ attempted to contact Respondent at a telephone number on file with the Department but was unable to contact him. The ALJ also attempted to email Respondent at his email address on file with the Department. Respondent did not respond to the email and did not call the ALJ by 10:30 a.m. on June 26, 2023.

21. The Department moved for default based on Respondent's failure to file an Answer to the Complaint and failure to appear at the prehearing telephone conference, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code §§ SPS 2.14 and HA 1.07(3)(c).

22. On June 26, 2023, the ALJ granted the Department's motion and issued a Notice of Default against Respondent. The ALJ ordered the Department to file a recommended Proposed Decision and Order by July 26, 2023. The Department timely filed its recommended Proposed Decision and Order.

DISCUSSION

Jurisdictional Authority

The Board has the authority to take adverse action against Respondent's multistate licensure privilege to practice in Wisconsin, pursuant to the Compact. Wis. Stat. § 441.51. The practice of nursing in a Compact party state under a multistate licensure privilege will subject a nurse to the jurisdiction of the licensing board, the courts, and the laws of the Compact party state in which the client is located at the time the service is provided. Wis. Stat. § 441.51(3)(e).

Since Wisconsin is the Compact state where the Respondent provided services to the patient in this case, the Board has the authority to impose discipline against the Respondent's multistate privilege to practice in Wisconsin, pursuant to Wis. Stat. §§ 441.51(5)(a)1. and 441.07(1g).

Pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.10(2), the undersigned ALJ has authority to preside over this disciplinary proceeding in accordance with Wis. Stat. § 227.46(1).

<u>Default</u>

The Department properly served the Notice of Hearing and Complaint upon Respondent by mailing copies to him at his last known address. Wis. Stat. § 440.11(2). Service by mail is complete upon mailing. Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.08(1).

An answer to a complaint shall be filed within 20 days from the date of service of the complaint. Wis. Admin. Code § 2.09(4). If a Respondent "fails to answer as required by s. SPS 2.09 or fails to appear at the hearing at the time fixed therefor, the respondent is in default and the disciplinary authority may make findings and enter an order on the basis of the complaint and other evidence." Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.14.

The administrative law judge may find a failure to appear at a telephone prehearing conference grounds for default if any of the following conditions exist for more than ten minutes after the scheduled time for the prehearing conference: (1) the failure to provide a telephone number to the ALJ after it had been requested; (2) the failure to answer the telephone; (3) the failure to free the line for the proceeding; and (4) the failure to be ready to proceed with the prehearing conference as scheduled. Wis. Admin. Code § HA 1.07(3)(c).

Here, Respondent failed to file an Answer to the Complaint within 20 days from the date of service, failed to appear at the prehearing telephone conference on June 26, 2023, failed to provide a telephone number to the ALJ after it had been requested, failed to answer the telephone when the ALJ called, and failed to be ready to proceed with the prehearing conference as scheduled. Therefore, Respondent is in default and findings may be made, and an order may be entered on the basis of the Complaint.

Violations

All Compact party states shall be authorized, in accordance with existing state due process law, to take adverse action against a nurse's multistate licensure privilege such as revocation, suspension, probation or any other action that affects a nurse's authorization to practice under a multistate licensure privilege...." Wis. Stat. § 441.51(3)(d). A nurse practicing in a party state must comply with the state practice laws of the state in which the patient is located at the time service is provided. The practice of nursing is not limited to patient care, but shall include all nursing practice as defined by the state practice laws of the party state in which the client is located. Wis. Stat. § 441.51(3)(e).

Under Wis. Stat. § 441.07(1g)(b) and (d), respectively, following an investigation and disciplinary hearing, if the Board determines that a nurse has committed "[o]ne or more violations of this subchapter or any rule adopted by the board under the authority of this subchapter" or has committed "[m]isconduct or unprofessional conduct," it may revoke, limit, or suspend his license, or reprimand him.

Wisconsin Administrative Code § N 7.03 sets forth the grounds for taking disciplinary action against a nurse. Those grounds include:

(1) Noncompliance with federal, jurisdictional, or reporting requirements including any of the following:

(c) After a request of the Board, failing to cooperate in a timely manner with the Board's investigation of a complaint filed against a license holder. There is a rebuttable presumption that a credential holder who takes longer than 30 days to respond to a request of the Board has failed to cooperate in a timely manner.

• • •

(6) Unsafe practice or substandard care, including any of the following:

(c) Departing from or failing to conform to the minimal standards of acceptable nursing practice that may create unnecessary risk or danger to a patient's life, health, or safety. Actual injury to a patient need not be established.

· · ·

(L) Failure to provide medically necessary items or services.

Respondent violated Wis. Admin. Code §§ N 7.03(1)(c), (6)(c), and (6)(L) by failing to cooperate with the Board's investigation, and by failing to conform to the minimal standards of acceptable nursing practice and to provide medically necessary services' when he failed to disconnect and properly flush Resident A's feeding tube while also failing to document any progress notes. The Respondent's actions created an unnecessary risk or danger to a patient's life, health and safety. These facts are undisputed and constitute grounds for discipline pursuant to Wisconsin Administrative Code § N 7.03.

Discipline

The three main purposes of discipline in a professional misconduct case are: (1) to promote the rehabilitation of the credential holder; (2) to protect the public from other instances of misconduct; and (3) to deter other credential holders from engaging in similar conduct. *State v. Aldrich*, 71 Wis. 2d 206, 209, 237 N.W.2d 689 (1976). In the present matter, the Division recommends that Respondent's privilege to practice as a registered nurse in the state of Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact be revoked. Given that the Respondent has made no argument to the contrary and because the recommended discipline is consistent with the purposes articulated in *Aldrich* by protecting the public and patients from other potential instances of misconduct by Respondent and deterring other credential holders from engaging in similar conduct, I adopt the Division's recommendation.

The possibility of Respondent's rehabilitation cannot be ascertained given Respondent's failure to respond to the Department, his failure to respond to the complaint or otherwise participate in these proceedings, and his failure to provide any defense for his actions. Respondent ignored the Department's attempts to contact him, even after signing for and receiving the Department's October 13, 2022, letter requesting his response to the complaint. However, the uncontroverted allegations in the Complaint are serious. Respondent neglected a nursing home resident under his care by failing to disconnect his feeding tube and leaving it connected overnight, causing the alarm to sound, and then by failing to flush the resident's feeding tube with water before connecting it for the resident's next scheduled feeding. Respondent also failed to document any progress notes. By these actions, Respondent failed to conform to the minimal standards of acceptable nursing practice that may have created unnecessary risk or danger to the resident's life, health, or safety, and failed to provide medically necessary services. Respondent also failed to respond to the Department's repeated requests for his response to the complaint made on behalf of the Board.

Revoking Respondent's Compact privilege to practice in Wisconsin will deter other credential holders from coming to Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact and engaging in similar conduct by sending a message that such conduct by a nurse is intolerable.

The Wisconsin Legislature codified the Compact in Wis. Stat. § 441.51. The declaration of purpose states that the health and safety of the public are affected by the degree of compliance with, and the effectiveness of, enforcement activities related to state nurse licensure laws, and that violations of nurse licensure and other laws regulating the practice of nursing may result in injury or harm to the public. Wis. Stat. § 441.51(1)(a)1. and 2. The purpose of the Compact includes facilitating the states' responsibility to protect the public's health and safety, promoting compliance with the laws governing the practice of nursing in each jurisdiction, and investing all party states with the authority to hold a nurse accountable for meeting all state practice laws in the state in which the patient is located at the time care is rendered. Wis. Stat. § 441.51(1)(b)1., 4. and 5.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court has acknowledged that "the purpose of licensing statutes is not to benefit those persons licensed to practice under the statutes, but rather to protect the public by the requirement of a license as a condition precedent to practicing in a given profession. The granting of a license pursuant to such a statute has been characterized as a privilege." *Gilbert v. State Medical Examining Board*, 119 Wis. 2d 168, 188, 349 N.W. 2d 68 (1984). "Such statutes are grounded in the state's police power to protect the public welfare through safeguarding the life, health, and property of its citizens." *Id.* "Protection of the public is the purpose of requiring a license." *State ex rel. Green v. Clark*, 235 Wis. 628, 631, 294 N.W. 25 (1940).

Revoking Respondent's privilege to practice in Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact holds Respondent accountable for failing to meet Wisconsin's nurse practice act and protects the public by preventing Respondent from violating Wisconsin's rules of professional conduct again. Respondent's actions warrant this discipline. Respondent neglected an especially vulnerable and dependent feeding tube patient while serving in a position of authority as interim Director of Nursing at the Facility. His failure to document any progress notes exacerbated the situation by

making it difficult for other providers to understand and fix the situation. Finally, Respondent's failure to respond to the complaint is further evidence that he has no regard for the Board's authority or any inclination to explain or otherwise rehabilitate himself.

The recommended discipline is consistent with Board precedent. See In the Matter of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Lametra D. Bilbo, Order Number 0007423 (June 10, 2021) (Board accepted Respondent's surrender of her privilege to practice nursing in Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact after removing prescription medications from a healthcare facility without authorization).³ See also In the Matter of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Laurel J. Lynch, R.N., Order Number 0006974 (September 10, 2020) (Board revoked Respondent's right to renew her license after the Missouri Board of Nursing issued a cease and desist order for diverting controlled substances while working in Missouri under the Compact, and failing to cooperate with the Board's investigation).⁴

Based upon the facts of this case and the factors set forth in *Aldrich*, the discipline recommended by the Department, pursuant to the terms and conditions of the Order below, is reasonable and warranted.

<u>Costs</u>

The Board is vested with discretion concerning whether to assess all or part of the costs of this proceeding against Respondent. See Wis. Stat. § 440.22(2). In exercising such discretion, the Board must look at aggravating and mitigating facts of the case; it may not assess costs against a credential holder based solely on a "rigid rule or invocation of an omnipresent policy," such as preventing those costs from being passed on to others. Noesen v. State Department of Regulation & Licensing, Pharmacy Examining Board, 2008 WI App 52, ¶¶ 30-32, 311 Wis. 2d. 237, 751 N.W.2d 385. In previous orders, Boards have considered the following factors when determining if all or part of the costs should be assessed against the Respondent: (1) the number of counts charged, contested and proven; (2) the nature and seriousness of the misconduct; (3) the level of discipline sought by the prosecutor; (4) the Respondent's cooperation with the disciplinary process; (5) prior discipline, if any; (6) the fact that the Department is a program revenue agency, funded by other credential holders; and (7) any other relevant circumstances. See In the Matter of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Elizabeth Buenzli-Fritz, LS0802183CHI (Aug. 14, 2008). It is within the Board's discretion as to which of these factors to considered.

Considering the above factors, it is appropriate for Respondent to pay the full costs of the investigation and of this proceeding. Respondent defaulted and the serious factual allegations identified in the complaint were deemed admitted. The Department has proved the grounds for discipline against Respondent. Finally, Respondent failed to provide current contact information to the ALJ, failed to appear at the prehearing conference, and failed to file an Answer to the

³ This decision is available online at: <u>ORDER0007423-00017816.pdf (wi.gov)</u>.

⁴ This decision is available online at: <u>https://online.drl.wi.gov/decisions/2020/ORDER0006974-</u>00016995.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

Complaint or otherwise provide any argument regarding the allegations brought against his privilege to practice as a registered nurse in Wisconsin.

The Department is a program revenue agency whose operating costs are funded by the revenue received from credential holders. It would be unfair to impose the costs of pursuing discipline in this matter on those credential holders who have not engaged in misconduct. Therefore, it is appropriate for Respondent to pay the full costs of the investigation and this proceeding, as determined pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.18.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

- 1. The Board has jurisdiction and is authorized to take adverse action against a nurse's multistate licensure privilege in accordance with Wis. Stat. §§ 441.51(3)(d) and (e) and (5)(a)1.
- 2. Respondent is in default for failing to file an answer to the Complaint and failing to appear at the telephone prehearing conference held on June 26, 2023, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.09(4), § SPS 2.14; and Wis. Admin. Code § HA 1.07(3).
- 3. Respondent violated Wis. Admin. Code §N 7.03(1)(c) by failing to cooperate in a timely manner with the Board's investigation of a complaint filed against a license holder.
- 4. Respondent violated Wis. Admin. Code § N 7.03(6)(c), and (6)(L) by departing from and/or failing to conform to the minimal standards of acceptable nursing practice that created an unnecessary risk or danger to a patient's life, health, or safety and by failing to provide medically necessary services.
- 5. The recommended discipline to revoke the Respondent's privilege to practice as a registered nurse in the state of Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact is reasonable and warranted.
- 6. It is appropriate for Respondent to pay the full costs of the investigation and this proceeding pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.18.
- 7. The Division of Hearings and Appeals has authority to preside over this disciplinary proceeding and issue a proposed decision in accordance with Wis. Stat. § 227.46(1) and Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.10(2).

<u>ORDER</u>

For the reasons set forth above, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Respondent's privilege to practice as a registered nurse in the state of Wisconsin pursuant to the Compact is hereby REVOKED.

2. Respondent shall pay all recoverable costs in this matter in an amount to be established, pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § SPS 2.18. After the amount is established, payment shall be made by certified check or money order payable to the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services and sent to the address below:

Department Monitor Division of Legal Services and Compliance Department of Safety and Professional Services P.O. Box 7190, Madison, WI 53707-7190 Telephone (608) 266-2112; Fax (608) 266-2264 DSPSMonitoring@wisconsin.gov

3. The terms of the Order are effective the date the Final Decision and Order in this matter is signed by the Board.

Dated at Madison, Wisconsin, on August 30, 2023.

STATE OF WISCONSIN DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS 4822 Madison Yards Way, 5th Floor North Madison, Wisconsin 53705 Telephone: (608) 266-2447 Email: <u>Kristin.Fredrick@wisconsin.gov</u>

By:

Kristin P. Fredrick Administrative Law Judge