5.7: V Glossary

**Adults at risk:** Adults who have a physical or mental condition that impairs their ability to care for their own needs and are at risk for neglect and/or abuse.

**Assault:** Intentionally putting another person in reasonable apprehension of an imminent harmful or offensive contact.

**Autonomy:** The capacity to determine one’s own actions through independent choice, including demonstration of competence. The nurse’s primary ethical obligation is client autonomy.

**Battery:** Intentional causation of harmful or offensive contact with another person without that person’s consent.

**Beneficence:** Benefiting others by preventing harm, removing harmful conditions, or affirmatively acting to benefit another or others, often going beyond what is required by law.

**Board of Nursing:** The state-specific licensing and regulatory body that sets standards for safe nursing care and issues nursing licenses to qualified candidates based on the Nurse Practice Act enacted by that state’s legislature.

**Capacity:** A functional determination that an individual is or is not capable of making a medical decision within a given situation.

**Competency:** A legal term related to the degree of cognitive ability an individual has to make decisions or carry out specific acts.

**Confidentiality:** The right of an individual to have personal, identifiable medical information kept private.

**Civil law:** The rights, responsibilities, and legal relationships between private citizens and involves compensation to the injured party.
Criminal law: A system of laws that punishes individuals who commit crimes.

Defamation of character: Actions when an individual makes negative, malicious, and false remarks about another person to damage their reputation.

Defendants: The parties named in the lawsuit.

Emergency admission: Individuals are admitted to psychiatric facilities under emergency admission status when they are deemed likely to harm themselves or others.

False imprisonment: An act of restraining another person and causing that person to be confined in a bounded area.

Fraud: An intentional tort that occurs when an individual is deceived for personal gain.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA): Federal regulations to ensure the privacy and protection of personal records and information.

Informed consent: The fundamental right of an individual to receive information about the risks, benefits, and alternatives in order to make a healthcare decision.

Intentional tort: A wrong that the defendant knew (or should have known) would be caused by their actions.

Involuntary admission: Circumstances when a person becomes so mentally ill they are at risk of hurting themselves or others, and inpatient care becomes necessary even though the individual does not desire inpatient care.

Justice: A moral obligation to act on the basis of equality and equity and a standard linked to fairness for all in society.

Malpractice: A specific term used for negligence committed by a health professional with a license.

Mandated reporters: Nurses and other professionals required by state law to report suspected neglect and/or abuse of children, adults at risk, and the elderly.

Negligence: The failure to exercise the ordinary care a reasonable person would use in similar circumstances.

Nonmaleficence: The bioethical principle that specifies a duty to do no harm and balances avoidable harm with benefits of good achieved.

Nurse Practice Act: Law enacted by that state’s legislature that establishes regulations for nursing practice within that state and defines the scope of nursing practice.

Plaintiff: A person bringing a lawsuit.

Protected Health Information (PHI): Individually identifiable health information including demographic data that relates to the individual’s past, present, or future physical or mental health or condition; the provision of health care to the individual; and the past, present, or future payment for the provision of health care to the individual.

Psychiatric Advance Directive (PAD): A legal document that describes a person’s preferences for future mental health
treatment or names an individual to make treatment decisions for them if they are in a crisis and unable to make decisions.

**Restraints:** Devices used in health care settings to prevent patients from causing harm to themselves or others when alternative interventions are not effective.

**Role fidelity:** Being responsible for providing competent nursing care.

**Seclusion:** The confinement of a patient in a locked room from which they cannot exit on their own. It is generally used as a method of discipline, convenience, or coercion.

**Standards of Professional Nursing Practice:** Authoritative statements from the American Nurses Association regarding the actions and behaviors that all registered nurses, regardless of role, population, specialty, and setting, are expected to perform competently.

**Standards of Professional Performance:** Twelve standards set by the American Nurses Association that describe a nurse’s professional behavior, including activities related to ethics, advocacy, respectful and equitable practice, communication, collaboration, leadership, education, scholarly inquiry, quality of practice, professional practice evaluation, resource stewardship, and environmental health.

**Tort:** An act of commission or omission that gives rise to injury or harm to another and amounts to a civil wrong for which courts impose liability.

**Unintentional tort:** A wrong that occurs when the defendant’s actions or inactions were unreasonably unsafe. Unintentional torts can result from acts of commission (i.e., doing something a reasonable nurse would not have done) or omission (i.e., failing to do something a reasonable nurse would do).

**Veracity:** Telling the truth.

**Voluntary admission:** An individual over age 16 who presents to a psychiatric facility and requests hospitalization. They are considered competent with the capacity to make health care decisions (unless determined otherwise).