Where Do You Keep Your License?

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I am always happy to get the hard copy of my professional nurse license in my hands. Even though I renew on time, I am never quite sure "all is well" until it comes in the mail and I see it with my own eyes. I then place it in a safe place in my office.

You may think that my anxiety about getting a hard copy of my nurse (and law) license is a bit strange. Well, perhaps so, but in today's society, there are so many potential threats to keeping one's identity from the hands of thieves who would like to benefit from your identity and the hard work it took to get you where you are today.

As you can image, a license to practice a profession is worth its weight in gold. Think about someone who wants access to drugs and uses your identity, with wallet license in hand, to get hired as a nurse in an acute care facility—albeit perhaps for a short period of time—thanks to your nursing license.

Or, what about the individual who steals your wallet or purse, finding your nurse license as one of the wallet's contents. That thief could easily sell your license on the street to another who, for example, uses it to call in a prescription for his or her own use, or for another's use. The scenario would be: "Hi, Mr. Pharmacist. This is Sue Jones, RN, and I just started to work for Dr. Fred Smith. He has asked me to phone in a prescription for one of our patients. The patient will be in to pick it up later today…..".

Another scenario is a co-worker, or perhaps even a relative, who slips your license from your wallet or locker, copies it, returns it to the wallet or locker, and, unknown to you, convincingly alters the license with his or her own name and uses the fake,altered license to keep his or her job, which requires additional certification, education or licensure.

A thief might also want to have your name and license number to falsely certify something, such as that you did a physical examination and administered a vaccination required for a school age child to attend school.

The possibilities of the misuse of your professional nurse license are endless. Sure, you may be able to correct any misuse of the license when you discover it, but that takes time, effort, and perhaps even money to "clear" your name.

You are obligated to—and must–protect the hard copy of your nurse license—both wallet size and wall size—with care.

Some suggestions to do so include:

- Never carry your nurse license regularly in your wallet. If you need it to gain entrance into a CE program or other event to prove you are an R.N., remove it from your wallet at the end of the day and return it to its secure storage place;
- When required to display your license at your place of work (e.g., as a nurse practitioner in a clinic), place it on a wall in a frame that is near to the reception desk, for example, where there are people on a regular basis, and check it regularly to see that it is still there;
- If you are required to display your license at your place of work, and you have used your home address as your contact for the board of nursing rather than your workplace, cover your address on the license to ensure no one can use it;
- Never lend your license to anyone, regardless of whom they are;
- Employers should not ask that nurse licensees bring their original license to HR, for example, for storage there while an employee. The employer is required to ensure licensure for all employees who have them. So, a better approach is to have you give the employer your license for copying, the license is given back to you immediately, the copy is stamped “COPY”, and all copies are kept under lock and key with limited access by one or two designated individuals;
- If your license is lost, stolen, or not found for any reason, notify the state board of nursing immediately so that a duplicate license can be issued to you and it is aware that the license has been possibly compromised in some way; and
- Find a secure, consistent place to keep your license in your home or in your office.

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