

# CODE OF CONDUCT

Professional Principles, Standards  
and Ethics for Pharmacists

# What is the Code of Conduct?

This Code of Conduct (the Code) is a public declaration of the principles and ethical standards which govern pharmacists in the practice of their profession, and which the public, patients<sup>1</sup>, other healthcare professionals and society require and expect from pharmacists.

<sup>1</sup> When 'patient' is referred to in this document, this relates to the service user themselves and, where appropriate, to their carer, representative or a family member.

# Code of Conduct for Pharmacists

## 7 Principles



# Why does the Code matter?

## **Trust**

The public and other healthcare professionals place significant trust in every pharmacist. He/she must maintain a high level of professionalism and competence in order to earn and maintain that trust. Pharmacists are required not only to display full technical competence in their chosen profession but also to behave with probity and integrity and to be accountable in this regard for their actions or omissions.

## **Ethics**

Ethics represent a set of values which sit at the centre of the professions' expected behaviours. Ongoing ethical behaviour builds a professional representation of the individual pharmacist and of the profession as a whole. Ethical values provide a framework to support a professional in making difficult decisions and guide their practice in the interest of patients and the public, while also acknowledging his/her duties and obligations as a professional.

## **Structure of the Code**

The Code sets out seven statutory principles which pharmacists are required to uphold. The principles are described on pages 4 and 5 of this document.

The Code also provides direction on how compliance with each principle is demonstrated. This direction is intended to inform pharmacists on the proper use of the Code. These directions are neither exhaustive nor exclusive.

This Code provides patients and the public with a detailed picture of the professional responsibilities of a pharmacist.

## **Applying the Code**

Pharmacists must comply with the principles of the Code and apply the principles to their everyday practice. Pharmacists must use their professional judgement and clinical expertise in order to make ethical decisions, while observing relevant legislation, practice standards and guidance. This may involve balancing different responsibilities and priorities.

The Code is a framework to ensure that the health, wellbeing, care and safety of patients is the pharmacist's primary priority. Pharmacists are personally accountable for their actions and must be in a position to justify any decision made. The Code is applicable to all registered pharmacists, because the actions of any pharmacist may impact on the profession as a whole and on broader patient welfare, even when he/she does not have direct contact with patients.

Where 'must' is used in the Code this indicates an action which a pharmacist is obliged to take and where no deviation is allowed. Where 'should' is used in the Code this indicates a strong recommendation to take a particular action, and where any deviation must be justified.

## **Misconduct**

The Pharmacy Act 2007 (the Act) defines professional misconduct as any act, omission or pattern of conduct which, amongst other things, is a breach of the Code. Any breach of the Code must be interpreted, in light of the case law, to mean a "serious breach" if it is to amount to professional misconduct. According to the case law, a "serious breach" is a breach whereby a pharmacist's conduct is considered to have fallen "*seriously short, by omission or commission, of the standard of conduct expected amongst practitioners.*"<sup>2</sup> The Act also provides that professional misconduct does not include an act, omission or pattern of conduct that consists of a, wrongly formed, but honestly formed, professional judgment.

## **When does the Code come into effect?**

The Code of Conduct – Professional Principles, Standards and Ethics for Pharmacists (2019) is effective from 21 October 2019. This Code replaces the Code of Conduct for Pharmacists (2009). The 2009 Code shall continue to apply to all actions by pharmacists taken prior to the 2019 Code coming into effect.

2 O'Laire v. Medical Council, Unreported January 27th 1995.

# Principles of the Code of Conduct



## Principle One: Put the Patient First

Always put the patient first and make their health, wellbeing and safety your primary focus. Make sure patients' needs are recognised, assessed and responded to and that their dignity is preserved and their values respected. Decision making must be evidence based. When supplying products or services without a comprehensive evidence base you should be satisfied that the needs of the patient are best met by the approach taken. Apply your knowledge and skills to ensure the patient receives safe and effective care. Recognise that your decisions and behaviour as a pharmacist can influence patient care even if you do not work in direct contact with the patient.



## Principle Two: Act Professionally

Uphold the reputation of the profession by acting with honesty, probity and integrity, as patients expect to be able to trust that you act in their best interests at all times. Work continuously to promote a culture of respect, trust and a focus on the individual person to ensure the patient receives person-centred care. Make sure that your conduct at all times, both inside and outside your work environment, ensures public trust and confidence in the pharmacy profession.



## Principle Three: Communicate Effectively

Communicate effectively so that patients receive safe and appropriate care. Ask relevant questions, listen carefully and respect confidentiality. Welcome questions from patients and respond to them in an open, accurate and honest way. Communicate in a manner that enables patients to make decisions that are informed and right for them.



## Principle Four: Work with Others

Work in partnership with patients and members of all healthcare disciplines to ensure that the patient receives safe and effective care. Build effective working relationships with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals in order to deliver person-centred care. Collaborate with your colleagues and other healthcare professionals to build confidence, respect and understanding. Work with the patient, family, carers and/or named representative to enable them to make evidence-based healthcare decisions that are consistent with their needs, values and preferences.



### **Principle Five: Show Leadership**

Lead by example and help promote and maintain the delivery of continuously-improving, high-quality and compassionate healthcare. Demonstrate leadership to the people you work with and to others, in whatever role you perform as a pharmacist. Promote the health and wellbeing of patients, by acting as a leader in the safe and effective use of medicines and healthcare resources. Promote and strengthen a culture of quality and safety, acting as a role model for the safe supply of medicines. Lead colleagues in supporting local and national public health initiatives.



### **Principle Six: Maintain Competence**

Maintain and improve your knowledge, skills and competence throughout your professional career in order to safely deliver and continually improve patient care. Undertake appropriate learning and development activities to maintain and develop your competence and your professional performance. Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date over the course of your career, to reflect the changing nature of healthcare and the roles carried out by pharmacists. Apply this knowledge and skill in decision making to ensure safe and effective care for the patient.



### **Principle Seven: Be Open and Honest**

Promote patient safety through open and honest communication with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals. Raise any concerns you may have about patient safety or other safety issues. Be honest when something goes wrong and learn from these incidents. Challenge poor practices and behaviours to improve existing pharmacy practice and always act to foster a culture of patient safety.



## Principle 1

### Put the Patient First

Always put the patient first and make their health, wellbeing and safety your primary focus. Make sure patients' needs are recognised, assessed and responded to and that their dignity is preserved and their values respected. Decision making must be evidence based. When supplying products or services without a comprehensive evidence base you should be satisfied that the needs of the patient are best met by the approach taken. Apply your knowledge and skills to ensure the patient receives safe and effective care. Recognise that your decisions and behaviour as a pharmacist can influence patient care even if you do not work in direct contact with the patient.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must apply your knowledge, skills and evidence based decision making to ensure the patient receives safe and effective care
2. Must treat all patients as individuals and treat them with respect, dignity, courtesy, integrity and honesty
3. Must recognise and respect patients' values, diversity, beliefs and cultural identity and make sure they are treated fairly
4. Must adhere to the principles of consent, complying with all statutory provisions in this regard
5. Must respect the right of the patient to refuse treatment or services
6. Must not allow your personal views to jeopardise or compromise patient care
7. Must treat persons equally, including those who may be vulnerable or anyone with a physical, intellectual or other disability
8. Must raise concerns with relevant persons or organisations to safeguard the health and wellbeing of patients

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 2

### Act Professionally

Uphold the reputation of the profession by acting with honesty, probity and integrity, as patients expect to be able to trust that you act in their best interests at all times. Work continuously to promote a culture of respect, trust and a focus on the individual person to ensure the patient receives person-centred care. Make sure that your conduct at all times, both inside and outside your work environment, ensures public trust and confidence in the pharmacy profession.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must only practise when fit to do so
2. Should look after your own health and wellbeing
3. Must give honest, relevant and accurate information regarding the costs, benefits and risks of medicinal products, non-medicinal products and services
4. Must maintain the highest standards of probity by conducting yourself with honesty, impartiality and integrity
5. Must manage and declare conflicts of interest, including any commercial incentives, which could compromise your professional judgement or patient care
6. Must maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries with patients
7. Should use social media and other forms of electronic communication appropriately and responsibly, both professionally and personally
8. Must ensure you have sufficient training, skills and knowledge before supplying a product or providing a service
9. Should only supply or promote a product or service where the benefit of use outweighs the risk and there is appropriate evidence of efficacy
10. Must record, store and process all data accurately and appropriately, and only use data for the purpose for which it was obtained
11. Must be accurate and impartial when teaching others, when conducting research and when providing or publishing information

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 3

### Communicate Effectively

Communicate effectively so that patients receive safe and appropriate care. Ask relevant questions, listen carefully and respect confidentiality. Welcome questions from patients and respond to them in an open, accurate and honest way. Communicate in a manner that enables patients to make decisions that are informed and right for them.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must listen to the patient and respect their views about their health
2. Must seek all relevant and available information required to assess the patient's needs
3. Must provide information in a way that is clear to the patient, so that the patient is facilitated to make informed decisions and choices
4. Must ensure the patient has all the necessary information required and you must check the patient has correctly understood it
5. Should work to overcome any communication challenges and adapt your communication style or methods to meet the needs of each individual patient
6. Must work to communicate effectively with your colleagues and other healthcare professionals
7. Must respect patients' rights to privacy and confidentiality and ensure all staff maintain those rights, except where disclosure is legally required

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 4

### Work with Others

Work in partnership with patients and members of all healthcare disciplines to ensure that the patient receives safe and effective care. Build effective working relationships with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals in order to deliver person-centred care. Collaborate with your colleagues and other healthcare professionals to build confidence, respect and understanding. Work with the patient, family, carers and/or named representative to enable them to make evidence-based healthcare decisions that are consistent with their needs, values and preferences.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must enable patients to make their own choices about their healthcare and wellbeing by involving them and supporting them in decision making
2. Should encourage patients to be informed about their health
3. Must only operate within the scope of your practice, recognise your limitations and when necessary, refer the patient to another healthcare professional, whose expertise can best help the patient
4. Should enable and support patients in receiving care or treatment from another qualified healthcare provider
5. Must refer patients to an alternative provider if you cannot provide a professional service or medicinal product, including in the case of conscientious objection, ensuring that patient care is not jeopardised or compromised
6. Must work cooperatively with your colleagues and with other healthcare professionals, and you should respect their skills, expertise and contribution to patient care

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 5

### Show Leadership

Lead by example and help promote and maintain the delivery of continuously-improving, high-quality and compassionate healthcare. Demonstrate leadership to the people you work with and to others, in whatever role you perform as a pharmacist. Promote the health and wellbeing of patients, by acting as a leader in the safe and effective use of medicines and healthcare resources. Promote and strengthen a culture of quality and safety, acting as a role model for the safe supply of medicines. Lead colleagues in supporting local and national public health initiatives.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must encourage the safe, effective and rational use of medicinal products
2. Must take personal responsibility for all work carried out by you and by others working under your supervision
3. Should proactively identify potential areas of risk in your practice and take steps to mitigate these risks
4. Must only delegate tasks to individuals who are appropriately trained and competent
5. Must check staff have a full understanding of tasks delegated to them
6. Must never abuse your position as a regulated professional or act to influence others to abuse theirs
7. Must support cost-effective therapies and rational use of healthcare resources
8. Must co-operate with any legal or disciplinary processes
9. Must assess risk in the workplace and put systems in place to minimise risks to patients and staff, and optimise patient care and public safety
10. Should facilitate student learning to help them develop their professional knowledge, competence and confidence

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 6

### Maintain Competence

Maintain and improve your knowledge, skills and competence throughout your professional career in order to safely deliver and continually improve patient care. Undertake appropriate learning and development activities to maintain and develop your competence and your professional performance. Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date over the course of your career, to reflect the changing nature of healthcare and the roles carried out by pharmacists. Apply this knowledge and skill in decision making to ensure safe and effective care for the patient.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must comply with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements
2. Must identify areas where you need to update your knowledge and skills, must take action to address these, must document this and must apply the learning to your practice
3. Should keep up-to-date with developments and best practice guidelines in your field of practise
4. Should promote and encourage a culture of learning, training and development
5. Should share relevant knowledge, skills and expertise and learn from others

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.



## Principle 7

### Be Open and Honest

Promote patient safety through open and honest communication with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals. Raise any concerns you may have about patient safety or other safety issues. Be honest when something goes wrong and learn from these incidents. Challenge poor practices and behaviours to improve existing pharmacy practice and always act to foster a culture of patient safety.

#### In order to satisfy this principle, you:\*

1. Must communicate with patients in an open and honest manner when things go wrong with their care
2. Should apologise to the patient when things go wrong with their care
3. Must keep the patient informed when things go wrong with their care
4. Should support any person who raises a concern
5. Must respond quickly and appropriately to any concern raised or feedback received
6. Must take action when an incident occurs, rectify it and put a plan in place to prevent such an incident reoccurring
7. Should learn from concerns raised or feedback received, to ensure continuous improvement
8. Must raise a concern appropriately when you become aware of a colleague or other healthcare professional whose professional performance, mental or physical health may result in compromised patient care, other safety issues, or raises concerns as to his/her probity
9. Must raise a concern appropriately if you become aware of policies, systems or working conditions that may result in compromised patient care or other safety issues

\* This list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.





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