



**Royal
Pharmaceutical
Society**
of Great Britain

Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians

About this document

Registration as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician carries obligations as well as privileges. It requires you to:

- develop and use your professional knowledge and skills for the benefit of those who seek your professional services,
- maintain good professional relationships with others, and
- act in a way that promotes confidence and trust in the pharmacy professions.

The Code of Ethics sets out the principles that you must follow as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician. The Code is the Society's core guidance on the conduct, practice and professional performance expected of you. It is designed to meet our obligations under The Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians Order 2007 and other relevant legislation. The principles of the Code are intended to guide and support the work you do and the decisions you make. They also inform the general public of the standards of behaviour that can be expected from the pharmacy professions. The Code underpins all other standards and guidance we issue. We will review the Code in the light of changes within the professions or healthcare environment.

The Code is founded on seven principles which express the values central to the identity of the pharmacy professions. The seven principles and their supporting explanations encapsulate what it means to be a registered pharmacist or pharmacy technician. Making these principles part of your professional life will maintain patient safety and public confidence in the professions.

As well as the Code of Ethics, we have produced supporting standards and guidance documents that expand on aspects of the Code, or provide more detailed guidance on specific areas of pharmacy practice. You can download these documents and more copies of the Code from our website at www.rpsgb.org, or you can telephone us on 020 7735 9141.

Status of the Code of Ethics

The principles of the Code of Ethics are mandatory. As a registered pharmacist or pharmacy technician your professional and personal conduct will be judged against the Code. You must abide by its principles irrespective of the job you do. Disreputable behaviour, even if it is not directly connected to your professional practice, or failure to comply with the principles identified in the Code could put your registration at risk. The Society's fitness to practise committees will take account of the Code in considering cases that come before them but are not limited solely to the matters mentioned in it. They will consider the circumstances of an individual case when deciding whether or not action should follow.

The seven principles

As a pharmacist or pharmacy technician you must:

1. MAKE THE CARE OF PATIENTS YOUR FIRST CONCERN
2. EXERCISE YOUR PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF PATIENTS AND THE PUBLIC
3. SHOW RESPECT FOR OTHERS
4. ENCOURAGE PATIENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CARE
5. DEVELOP YOUR PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE
6. BE HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY
7. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR WORKING PRACTICES

Applying the principles

Pharmacists have overall responsibility for the provision of pharmaceutical services. Pharmacy technicians undertake work to support, develop or provide these services. Every registered pharmacy professional is responsible for their own actions.

It is your responsibility as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician to apply the principles of the Code of Ethics to your daily work, whether or not you routinely treat or care for patients. You must be able to show that you are aware of the Code and have followed the principles it lays down.

You are professionally accountable for your practice. This means that you are answerable for your acts and omissions, regardless of advice or directions from your manager or another professional. You are expected to use your professional judgement in the light of the principles of the Code and must be prepared to justify your actions if asked to do so.

Users of pharmaceutical services include patients, customers and clients. The Code uses the term patient(s) to encompass any individuals or groups who access or are affected by your professional pharmacy services or advice. If you offer veterinary pharmacy services, the term patient also extends to the animals you provide services for.

The work of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians takes many different forms and accordingly not all of the principles will be applicable to every situation you find yourself in. The seven principles are of equal importance. Each principle is supported by a series of statements that explain the types of action and behaviour expected of you when applying the principles in practice. These are not exhaustive. In meeting the principles of the Code you are expected to comply with other accepted standards and take account of guidance issued by the Society or other relevant organisations.

From time to time you may be faced with conflicting professional obligations or legal requirements. In these circumstances you must consider fully the options available to you, evaluate the risks and benefits associated with possible courses of action and determine what is most appropriate in the interests of patients and the public.

1. MAKE THE CARE OF PATIENTS YOUR FIRST CONCERN

The care, well-being and safety of patients are at the centre of everyday professional practice. They must be your primary and continuing concern when practising, irrespective of your field of work. Even if you do not have direct contact with patients your actions or behaviour can still impact on their care or safety. You must:

- 1.1** Provide a proper standard of practice and care to those for whom you provide professional services.
- 1.2** Take steps to safeguard the well-being of patients, particularly children and other vulnerable individuals.
- 1.3** Promote the health of patients.
- 1.4** Seek all relevant information required to assess an individual's needs and provide appropriate treatment and care. Where necessary, refer patients to other health or social care professionals or other relevant organisations.
- 1.5** Seek to ensure safe and timely access to medicines and take steps to be satisfied of the clinical appropriateness of medicines supplied to individual patients.
- 1.6** Encourage the effective use of medicines and be satisfied that patients, or those who care for them, know how to use their medicines.
- 1.7** Be satisfied as to the integrity and quality of products to be supplied to patients.
- 1.8** Maintain timely, accurate and adequate records and include all relevant information in a clear and legible form.
- 1.9** Ensure you have access to the facilities, equipment and materials necessary to provide services to professionally accepted standards.
- 1.10** Undertake regular reviews, audits and risk assessments to improve the quality of services and minimise risks to patient and public safety.

2. EXERCISE YOUR PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF PATIENTS AND THE PUBLIC

The need to balance the requirements of individuals with society as a whole and manage competing priorities and obligations is a feature of professional life. Guidelines, targets and financial constraints need to be taken into account, but they must not be allowed to compromise your ability to make an informed professional judgement on what is appropriate for patients in specific situations. When acting in your professional capacity you must:

- 2.1** Consider and act in the best interests of individual patients and the public.
- 2.2** Make sure that your professional judgement is not impaired by personal or commercial interests, incentives, targets or similar measures.
- 2.3** Make best use of the resources available to you.
- 2.4** Be prepared to challenge the judgement of colleagues and other health or social care professionals if you have reason to believe that their decisions could compromise the safety or care of others.
- 2.5** Conduct research and development with integrity and obtain any necessary permissions from the appropriate regulatory authorities.
- 2.6** In an emergency take appropriate action to provide care and reduce risks to patients and the public, taking into account your competence and other options for assistance or care available.

3. SHOW RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Demonstrating respect for the dignity, views and rights of others is fundamental in forming and maintaining professionally appropriate relationships with patients, their carers, colleagues and other individuals with whom you come into contact with. In your professional practice you must:

- 3.1** Recognise diversity and respect the cultural differences, values and beliefs of others.
- 3.2** Treat others politely and considerately.
- 3.3** Make sure your views about a person's lifestyle, beliefs, race, gender, age, sexuality, disability or other perceived status do not prejudice their treatment or care.
- 3.4** Ensure that if your religious or moral beliefs prevent you from providing a particular professional service, the relevant persons or authorities are informed of this and patients are referred to alternative providers for the service they require.
- 3.5** Respect and protect the dignity and privacy of others. Take all reasonable steps to prevent accidental disclosure or unauthorised access to confidential information and ensure that you do not disclose confidential information without consent, apart from where permitted to do so by the law or in exceptional circumstances.
- 3.6** Obtain consent for the professional services, treatment or care you provide and the patient information you use.
- 3.7** Use information obtained in the course of professional practice only for the purposes for which it was given or where otherwise lawful.
- 3.8** Take all reasonable steps to ensure appropriate levels of privacy for patient consultations.
- 3.9** Maintain proper professional boundaries in the relationships you have with patients and other individuals that you come into contact with during the course of your professional practice, taking special care when dealing with vulnerable individuals.

4. ENCOURAGE PATIENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CARE

Patients have a right to be involved in decisions about their treatment and care. They should be encouraged to work in partnership with you and other members of the professional team to manage their healthcare needs. Successful partnership working requires effective communication and an ability to identify the individual needs of patients. Where patients are not legally capable of making decisions about their care you must seek the authority of persons who are empowered to make decisions on their behalf. You must:

- 4.1** When possible, work in partnership with patients, their carers and other healthcare professionals to manage the patient's treatment and care. Explain the options available and help individuals to make informed decisions about whether they wish to use particular services or treatment options.
- 4.2** Listen to patients and their carers and endeavour to communicate effectively with them. Ensure that, whenever possible, reasonable steps are taken to meet the particular communication needs of the patient.
- 4.3** Take all reasonable steps to share information that patients or their carers want or need in a way that they can understand, and make sure that the information you provide is impartial, relevant and up to date.
- 4.4** Subject to paragraph 3.5, ensure that information is shared appropriately with other health and social care professionals involved in the care of the patient.
- 4.5** Respect a patient's right to refuse to receive treatment, care or other professional services.
- 4.6** Consider and whenever possible take steps to address factors that may prevent or deter individuals from obtaining or taking their treatment.
- 4.7** Ensure that when a patient is not legally competent, any treatment or care you provide is in accordance with the appropriate legal requirements.

5. DEVELOP YOUR PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

At all stages of your professional working life you must ensure that your knowledge, skills and performance are of a high quality, up to date and relevant to your field of practice. You must:

- 5.1** Maintain and improve the quality of your work by keeping your knowledge and skills up to date, evidence-based and relevant to your role and responsibilities.
- 5.2** Apply your knowledge and skills appropriately to your professional responsibilities.
- 5.3** Recognise the limits of your professional competence; practise only in those areas in which you are competent to do so and refer to others where necessary.
- 5.4** Undertake and maintain up-to-date evidence of continuing professional development relevant to your field of practice.
- 5.5** Respond constructively to the outcomes of assessments, appraisals and reviews of your professional performance and undertake further training where necessary.
- 5.6** Practise only if you are fit and competent to do so. Promptly declare to the Society, your employer and other relevant authorities any circumstances that may call into question your fitness to practise or bring the pharmacy professions into disrepute, including ill health that impairs your ability to practise, criminal convictions and findings by other regulatory bodies or organisations.

6. BE HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY

Patients, colleagues and the public at large place their trust in you as a pharmacy professional. You must behave in a way that justifies this trust and maintains the reputation of your profession. You must:

- 6.1** Uphold public trust and confidence in your profession by acting with honesty and integrity.
- 6.2** Ensure you do not abuse your professional position or exploit the vulnerability or lack of knowledge of others.
- 6.3** Avoid conflicts of interest and declare any personal or professional interests to those who may be affected. Do not ask for or accept gifts, inducements, hospitality or referrals that may affect, or be perceived to affect, your professional judgement.
- 6.4** Be accurate and impartial when teaching others and when providing or publishing information to ensure that you do not mislead others or make claims that cannot be justified.
- 6.5** Adhere to accepted standards of personal and professional conduct.
- 6.6** Comply with legal requirements, mandatory professional standards and accepted best practice guidance.
- 6.7** Honour commitments, agreements and arrangements for the provision of professional services.
- 6.8** Respond honestly, openly and courteously to complaints and criticism.

7. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR WORKING PRACTICES

Team working is a key feature of everyday professional practice and requires respect, co-operation and communication with colleagues from your own and other professions. When working as part of a team you remain accountable for your own decisions, behaviour and any work done under your supervision. You must:

- 7.1 Communicate and work effectively with colleagues from your own and other professions and ensure that both you and those you employ or supervise have sufficient language competence to do this.
- 7.2 Contribute to the development, education and training of colleagues and students, sharing relevant knowledge, skills and expertise.
- 7.3 Take responsibility for all work done by you or under your supervision. Ensure that individuals to whom you delegate tasks are competent and fit to practise and have undertaken, or are in the process of undertaking, the training required for their duties.
- 7.4 Be satisfied that appropriate standard operating procedures exist and are adhered to, and that clear lines of accountability and verifiable audit trails are in place.
- 7.5 Ensure that you are able to comply with your legal and professional obligations and that your workload or working conditions do not compromise patient care or public safety.
- 7.6 Make sure that your actions do not prevent others from complying with their legal and professional obligations, or present a risk to patient care or public safety.
- 7.7 Ensure that all professional activities undertaken by you, or under your control, are covered by appropriate professional indemnity arrangements.
- 7.8 Be satisfied that there is an effective complaints procedure where you work and follow it at all times.
- 7.9 Raise concerns if policies, systems, working conditions, or the actions, professional performance or health of others may compromise patient care or public safety. Take appropriate action if something goes wrong or if others report concerns to you.
- 7.10 Co-operate with investigations into your or another healthcare professional's fitness to practise and abide by undertakings you give or any restrictions placed on your practice.

Guidance that supports the Code of Ethics

Supporting standards and guidance documents that expand on aspects of the Code, or provide more detailed guidance on specific areas of pharmacy practice are available on the Society's website at www.rpsgb.org. You can also telephone us on 020 7735 9141 or e-mail us at enquiries@rpsgb.org.

Other sources of advice

Further advice on the Code, or other professional or legal obligations, can be obtained by contacting our legal and ethical advisory service on 020 7572 2308, or email: ftp@rpsgb.org.



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