



# CODE OF ETHICS



## STATUS OF THE CODE OF ETHICS

All pharmacists registered with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland are obliged to provide a service of the highest quality.

This Code of Ethics details and explains the ***eight mandatory fundamental principles, of equal importance***, which are designed to protect the health and well being of the public and to ensure competence and ethical behaviour among members of the profession, regardless of area of practice. Each broad principle is elaborated in a series of more detailed ***obligations*** that explain the required standards or 'must-do's' of professional behaviour. This list is not exhaustive nor can it be.

**As a pharmacist registered with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland you must:**

- 1 Make the safety and welfare of patients your prime concern**
- 2 Respect and protect confidential information**
- 3 Show respect for others**
- 4 Exercise professional judgement in the interests of patients and public**
- 5 Encourage patients (and/or their carers as appropriate) to participate in decisions about their care**
- 6 Maintain and develop professional knowledge and competence**
- 7 Act with honesty and integrity**
- 8 Provide a high standard of practice and care at all times.**

From time to time the pharmacist may be faced with conflicting professional obligations or legal requirements. In these circumstances the pharmacist must:

- use professional judgement in the light of the principles of the Code,
- consider fully the options available,
- evaluate the risks and benefits associated with possible courses of action,
- exercise professional judgement in the best interests of the patient and public,
- be answerable for acts and omissions, regardless of advice or directions from a manager, employer or another professional,
- be accountable for professional practice, and
- justify actions if asked to do so.

The Eight Principles and their supporting Obligations encompass what it means to be a registered pharmacist in Northern Ireland.

The professional and personal conduct of the pharmacist will be judged against the Code. A breach of the obligations and by association, of the principles may bring the pharmacist's fitness to practise into question and may lead to referral to the Society's disciplinary process.

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 matters mentioned in it.

## PHARMACIST REGISTRATION

Obligations and privileges go hand in hand with registration as a pharmacist.

Registration as a pharmacist requires you to:

- use and develop your professional knowledge and skills for the benefit of those who seek your professional services,
- ensure professional activities are performed to an acceptable level,
- have regard to the laws and regulations applicable to pharmaceutical practice and maintain a high standard of professional conduct,
- establish and maintain good relationships with others, and
- act to promote and maintain public confidence in the pharmacy profession.

The Code is the Society's core guidance on the conduct, practice and professional performance expected of the pharmacist. The principles of the Code are intended to:

- maintain patient safety and public confidence in the profession,
- underpin all other standards and guidance issued by the Society and other organisations, principally the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS),
- inform the general public of the standards of behaviour that can be expected from the pharmacy profession, and
- guide and support the work of a pharmacist.

Users of pharmacy services include patients, clients, customers or service users. The concept also includes members of the public. 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 may also extend to the animals you provide services for.

## **PRINCIPLE 1:**

### **MAKE THE SAFETY AND WELFARE OF PATIENTS YOUR PRIME CONCERN**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 1.1 Act in a manner that promotes well being and safeguards the health and welfare of patients.
- 1.2 Take steps to safeguard the well being of vulnerable individuals, both adults and children.
- 1.3 Ensure the provision of a high standard of professional service by you or those working under your direct supervision.
- 1.4 Provide appropriate treatment and care based on relevant information you have available to you. Where appropriate, consult with other agencies and signpost or refer patients to other health and social care professionals and/or relevant organisations.
- 1.5 Ensure as far as possible the clinical appropriateness of medicines supplied to patients and their safe and timely access to them.
- 1.6 Promote the safe, effective and rational use of medicines by controlling the sale or supply of all medicinal and related products, especially those with a potential for abuse or dependency.
- 1.7 Ensure that patients, or their carers<sup>1</sup>, are supported to use or take their medicines properly.
- 1.8 Purchase medicines only from suppliers and sources known to be reputable to ensure the safety, quality and efficacy of products supplied to patients.
- 1.9 Complete patient records promptly and maintain them in a readily retrievable, organised and legible form.
- 1.10 Ensure you have the facilities, equipment and materials necessary to provide services to professionally acceptable standards.
- 1.11 Undertake regular reviews, audits and risk assessments.
- 1.12 Ensure you record, where appropriate, patient consent either in writing or electronically before providing a professional service.

<sup>1</sup> See definition of 'carer' in Appendix 1

## **PRINCIPLE 2:**

### **RESPECT AND PROTECT CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 2.1 Respect the confidentiality of information, professional or otherwise, acquired in the course of professional practice and only use it for the purposes for which it is given and in compliance with current legislation.
- 2.2 Maintain systems which ensure security of information and prevent unauthorised access to it.
- 2.3 Ensure that all who have access to patient/client information know and respect its confidential nature.
- 2.4 Ensure that confidential information is not disclosed without consent, except where legally permitted or in exceptional circumstances.

## **PRINCIPLE 3:**

### **SHOW RESPECT FOR OTHERS**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 3.1 Treat others with personal and professional courtesy.
- 3.2 Maintain proper and appropriate relationships with patients and those you come into contact with during the course of your professional practice. Take special care when dealing with vulnerable individuals, both adults and children.
- 3.3 Respect diversity in the cultural differences, beliefs and value-systems of others.
- 3.4 Ensure that your personal views about an individual's lifestyle, religious beliefs or political opinions, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or other perceived status do not affect your treatment of, or the professional service you offer to any individual or group.
- 3.5 Ensure that if your religious or moral beliefs prevent you from providing a particular professional service, the relevant persons or authorities including your employer, where appropriate, are informed of this and patients are referred to alternative providers for the service they require.
- 3.6 Obtain patient consent for the pharmacy services, treatment or care you provide, as appropriate.
- 3.7 Obtain consent for patient information you use in any other context.
- 3.8 Respect and protect the dignity and privacy of others. All patient consultations should take place in an appropriate environment.<sup>2</sup>

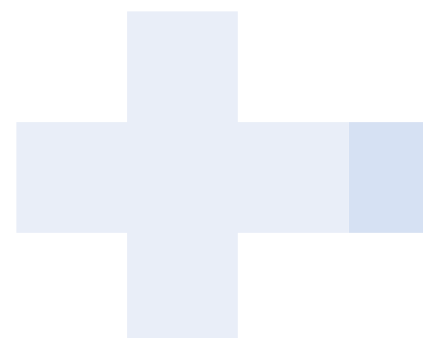
<sup>2</sup> See definition of 'appropriate environment' in Appendix 1.

## **PRINCIPLE 4:**

### **EXERCISE PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF PATIENTS AND PUBLIC**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 4.1 Consider and act in the best interests of individual patients and the public.
- 4.2 Ensure that your professional judgement is not impaired by personal or commercial interests, incentives, targets or similar measures.
- 4.3 Challenge the judgement of colleagues and other health and social care professionals if you have reason to believe that their decisions could compromise the safety or care of others.
- 4.4 Conduct research and development with professionalism and integrity and obtain any necessary approval from the appropriate regulatory authorities.
- 4.5 Work collaboratively with other health and social care professionals for patient benefit.
- 4.6 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.



## **PRINCIPLE 5:**

### **ENCOURAGE PATIENTS (AND/OR THEIR CARERS AS APPROPRIATE) TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CARE**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 5.1 Take all reasonable steps to provide information that patients (and/or their carers as appropriate) want or need, about their treatment and care, in a way that they can understand.
- 5.2 Patients (and/or their carers as appropriate) have a right to be involved in decisions about their treatment and care: work in partnership with the patient (and/or their carers as appropriate) and other members of the healthcare team to manage their treatment and care.
- 5.3 Respect patient choice: patients have a right to refuse to receive treatment, care or other professional services.
- 5.4 Investigate and, where possible, take steps to address factors that may prevent or deter individuals from obtaining or taking their treatment.
- 5.5 Listen to patients and their carers and respond to their needs and preferences.
- 5.6 Ensure that information is relevant and appropriate and ensure as far as possible that the patient or carer is afforded the opportunity to speak to the appropriate professional.
- 5.7 Ensure that, whenever possible, reasonable steps are taken to meet a patient's or carer's language and communication needs.
- 5.8 Keep up-to-date, and adhere to, all appropriate and current legislation pertaining to treatment and care of patients not legally competent.
- 5.9 Subject to paragraph 2.4 (*Confidential Information*) ensure that information is shared appropriately with other health and social care professionals involved in the care of the patient.



## **PRINCIPLE 6:**

### **MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 6.1 Undertake continuing professional development (CPD)<sup>3</sup> relevant to your area of practice and maintain appropriate evidence of participation.
- 6.2 Keep your knowledge and skills up to date, evidence-based and relevant to your role and responsibilities.
- 6.3 Apply your knowledge and skills appropriately to your professional responsibilities.
- 6.4 Only practise within your realm of competency and refer to others where necessary.
- 6.5 Knowledge, skills and professional performance should be subject to continuous review: reflect on outcomes of assessments, appraisals or reviews to identify developmental needs.
- 6.6 Practise only if you are competent and fit to do so. Promptly inform the Society, your employer and other relevant authorities of any circumstances that may call into question your fitness to practise or bring the pharmacy profession into disrepute, including:
  - ill-health (including chemical dependence), impairing ability to practise;
  - if you are subject to an investigation;
  - criminal convictions (including in another jurisdiction); and
  - adverse findings by other regulatory bodies or organisations.

<sup>3</sup> See definition of 'CPD' in Appendix 1

## **PRINCIPLE 7:**

### **ACT WITH HONESTY AND INTEGRITY**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 7.1 Maintain public trust and confidence in your profession by acting with honesty, integrity and professionalism.
- 7.2 Demonstrate high standards of personal and professional conduct at all times.
- 7.3 Act immediately, to address any situation should someone in your professional care come to harm, by sharing information with other health and social care professionals as appropriate.
- 7.4 Do not abuse your professional position or exploit the vulnerability or lack of knowledge of others.
- 7.5 Patient care and public confidence should not be compromised by any real or perceived conflicts of interest. This prevents the reception of gifts, favours, hospitality or referrals that may compromise, or be perceived to compromise, professional judgement. Declare any personal or professional interests to those who may be affected where appropriate.
- 7.6 All information provided, whether written or spoken, should be accurate and unambiguous, with no impression of unfair distinctions between pharmacists or pharmacies. Do not make claims that cannot be justified.
- 7.7 Honour commitments, agreements and arrangements for the provision of professional services.
- 7.8 Respond to complaints and criticism with honesty, transparency and courtesy.

## **PRINCIPLE 8:**

### **PROVIDE A HIGH STANDARD OF PRACTICE AND CARE AT ALL TIMES**

#### **OBLIGATIONS:**

- 8.1 Communicate, co-operate and work effectively with colleagues within and outside the profession.
- 8.2 Ensure that both you and those you employ or supervise have an appropriate level of language competence or skills.
- 8.3 Contribute to the development, education and training of colleagues and students, sharing relevant knowledge, skills and expertise.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 Be honest and objective when appraising or assessing the performance of colleagues, including students. Patients will be put at risk if someone is described as competent who has not reached or maintained a satisfactory standard of practice.
- 8.6 Provide only honest, justifiable and accurate comments when giving references for, or writing reports about, colleagues. References should be provided promptly and include all information that is relevant to a colleague's competence, performance or conduct.
- 8.7 Be satisfied that appropriate standard operating procedures (SOPs) exist, are adhered to and are monitored and revised as appropriate, and that clear lines of accountability and verifiable audit trails are in place.
- 8.8 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that both you and those you employ or supervise comply with all legal and professional requirements and best practice guidance.
- 8.9 Ensure that workload or working conditions do not compromise patient care or public safety.
- 8.10 Make sure that your actions do not prevent others from complying with their legal or professional obligations, or present a risk to patient care or public safety.
- 8.11 Ensure that all professional activities undertaken by you, or under your control, are covered by appropriate professional indemnity arrangements.
- 8.12 Ensure your place of work has an effective complaints procedure and follow it at all times.

- 8.13 Make known to relevant persons or bodies any concerns about policies, systems, working conditions, or the actions, professional performance or health of others that are likely to compromise patient care or public safety, or are already doing so.
- 8.14 Co-operate with investigations into the fitness to practise of either yourself or another healthcare professional; abide by undertakings you give and/or any restrictions placed on your practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The Code of Ethics for Pharmacists is supported by the following guidance documents which are available via the website of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, at [www.psni.org.uk](http://www.psni.org.uk). Hard copies are also available by contacting the Pharmaceutical Society by telephone (02890 326 927) or by email ([info@psni.org.uk](mailto:info@psni.org.uk)):

- Guidance for Pharmacists on Raising Concerns
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Patient Consent
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Patient Confidentiality
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Sale and Supply of Medicines
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Advertising of Medicines and Professional Services
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Internet Pharmacy Services
- Professional Standards and Guidance on Pharmacist Prescribing.

## OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE

Further advice on the Code or other professional or legal obligations can be obtained by contacting the Registrar at the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland on (028) 9032 6927.

## APPENDIX 1

### DEFINITIONS

#### CARER

Someone, who provides help and support to a partner, child, relative, friend or neighbour, unable to perform unaided essential daily functions. This could be due to age, physical or mental illness, addiction or disability.

#### APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT

A specific area should be provided in which a conversation can be conducted in private, free of interruptions and without the possibility of being overheard. (from, *The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union*).

#### CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

A systematic, ongoing cyclical process of self-directed learning. It includes everything a pharmacist<sup>4</sup> learns which enables him to do his job (current or future) more effectively.

This four stage cycle comprises:

- reflection (identification of learning needs);
- planning (what activities will be undertaken to meet the learning needs and when?);
- action (documenting what was learned); and,
- evaluation (deciding if learning needs were met and how this has been used in professional practice).

For record keeping purposes, pharmacists should document all four stages of the cycle for planned (scheduled) learning.

<sup>4</sup> 'Pharmacist' is used with the masculine pronoun but should be understood to refer to male/female gender.

## NOTES



## NOTES

