

Code Consultation

Professional standards of conduct, ethics and performance for pharmacists in Northern Ireland

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact us at Pharmaceutical Society NI, 73 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HL. Telephone number 02890326927 or by email on info@psni.org.uk and we will do our best to assist you.

About us

The Pharmaceutical Society NI regulates pharmacists and registered pharmacies in Northern Ireland. Our primary objectives are to protect the public and patients, uphold professional standards and maintain public confidence in the pharmacy profession.

Key areas of our work:

Education and training.

- We set standards for the education and training of pharmacists and accredit their qualifications and training.
- We set standards for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which must be completed annually and are designed to ensure that pharmacists keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

Registration.

- We maintain a publicly accessible register of pharmacists and pharmacies in Northern Ireland.

Set and monitor compliance with Professional Standards.

- We set the standards that pharmacists must meet to remain on the Register. We provide a suite of Guidance documents to assist pharmacists and pharmacy owners in this regard.

Act when our Standards are not met.

- As part of our regulatory functions, we investigate concerns that a pharmacist is not meeting our standards or other issues of concern and take action to restrict their ability to practice, when necessary, to protect patients and the public.

Set and monitor compliance with Premises Standards.

- We set the standards for registered pharmacies which require them to provide for the safe and effective practice of pharmacy. We liaise with the Pharmacy Inspectorate who inspect pharmacies in Northern Ireland to

check if premises are meeting these standards and raise any matters of concern with us for consideration.

Introduction

Pharmacists play a vital role in caring for patients and protecting public health throughout Northern Ireland. The role of pharmacists and the pharmacy team is continually evolving, with pharmacists taking on increasingly clinical roles, involving greater interaction with, and clinical assessment of, patients and the public.

Pharmacists are integrated into the wider healthcare system, working in new settings as part of multidisciplinary teams, using changing technology and information sharing systems. Throughout all of this, pharmacists have an obligation to provide safe, effective, and compassionate care for patients and the public. Patients and the public equally have a right to expect such care from pharmacists.

The Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance

The Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 as amended¹ imposes an obligation on the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland to “set standards relating to the conduct, ethics, and performance expected of registered persons”.

The purpose of the Code is to guide and support registrants in their scope of practice, professional development and decision making. The attitudes, behaviour and clinical ability of pharmacists is vital to ensuring they provide safe, effective, and compassionate care. We consider the Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance (the Code) to be the key tool for pharmacists in framing their relationship and commitment to patients and the public.

The Standards of the Code are written as an affirmation pharmacists must give to uphold specific standards and to practice pharmacy ethically upon joining the Register of the Pharmaceutical Society NI and on renewing their annual registration.

¹ Paragraph 1(1a) of Schedule 3 to the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended)

This affirmation reminds pharmacists of their responsibility to their patients and the public and the importance of meeting the expected standards throughout their career. There are seven Standards which if met, we consider will deliver safe, effective, and compassionate care for patients and the public. Each Standard is followed by an illustrative list of behaviours and activities a pharmacist should follow to meet the Standards.

The Code is applicable to all pharmacists regardless of the setting within which they work and must be adhered to at all times, both when a pharmacist is working and when they are not. This is because public confidence in the pharmacy profession can be impacted by the behaviour of pharmacists whether in or outside of work.

Applying the Standards – using professional judgement

A key principle of being a healthcare professional, responsible for making decisions about patient care, is using professional judgement. We consider professional judgement as vital for utilising and applying the Standards of the Code.

Professional judgment can be defined as the use of knowledge, including professional standards, laws and ethical principles, clinical expertise, and experience to develop an opinion or decision about patient care and treatment.

The Code should be a key resource and tool when pharmacists are faced with situations where they must choose between several potential courses of action in the best interests of a patient. The Standards are not designed to be an exhaustive list of “do’s and don’ts” covering every scenario a pharmacist may encounter throughout their practice. They are there to support pharmacists when making decisions, providing a framework to help when making professional judgements.

A pharmacist must adhere to the relevant law, standards and guidance related to their area of practice. A pharmacist may be confronted with competing information or obligations and must use their professional judgement in making difficult decisions in the best interests of patients and the public. A pharmacist must always be able to justify the decisions they make.

Pharmacists' professional organisations² offer guidance on professional judgment and some of the processes a pharmacist may go through to apply it.

Pharmacy students and Foundation Year Trainees

Pharmacy students and Foundation Year Trainees are the pharmacists of tomorrow.

The Code should form a core part of their learning and supervised practice throughout their journey to becoming a pharmacist in Northern Ireland.

The activities and behaviours of pharmacy students and trainees can also have an impact on public confidence in the overall pharmacy profession. We will consider any activities or behaviours during a pharmacist's education and training, which may have amounted to a breach of the Code when they join the Register.

Accountability – what happens if the Standards are not met.

The purpose of Fitness to Practise proceedings is to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the pharmacy profession and maintain professional standards.

Breaching of the Code is a factor considered by the Pharmaceutical Society NI in conducting an investigation of a pharmacist's actions. We will ensure fairness and proportionality in our approach to Fitness to Practise, treating pharmacists in an open and honest way.

If a pharmacist's Fitness to Practise is found to be impaired, they may receive a warning, be subject to conditions on their practise, be suspended or removed from the Register.

² One example of a professional guide to professional judgment which is endorsed by the Pharmacy Forum of Northern Ireland is <https://www.rpharms.com/resources/pharmacy-guides/professional-judgement> (Note: a free sign in is currently required for this site. We are working on having this information on an open access site)

Patients' rights

Our expectation is that the Code will be used to help develop successful clinical relationships between patients and pharmacists, and deliver safe, effective and compassionate care. However, sometimes things can go wrong. Patients and the public can raise concerns if they feel the care they received has not been safe, effective or compassionate and if the actions of a pharmacist did not meet the Standards outlined in the Code.

Patients, pharmacists and the public can raise concerns about a pharmacist or pharmacy premises or pharmacy owner directly with the Pharmaceutical Society NI. Information on how to do this can be found in the 'Raising Concerns' section of our website, by telephoning us on 02890326927 and select Option 6 – Raising Concerns or by contacting us by email at: concerns-ftp@psni.org.uk

or write to us at:

Raising Concerns and Fitness to Practise Department
Pharmaceutical Society NI
73 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1HL.

Overview of the Standards



The Affirmation of the Standards

To provide safe, effective, and compassionate care, I will:

- **Always put the patient first.**
- **Always act with professionalism.**
- **Communicate effectively and appropriately.**
- **Work collaboratively with colleagues.**
- **Be open and honest and act with integrity.**
- **Raise concerns when things go wrong and deal appropriately with any concerns raised.**
- **Maintain and develop professional skills and knowledge.**

Always put the patient first.

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Obtain consent to provide care and pharmacy services, complying with all statutory obligations.
- Respect and maintain patient confidentiality.
- Provide appropriate information for patients to make informed decisions about their care.

- Actively involve and empower patients to make decisions about their care.
- Recognise and accept a patient's right to refuse treatment.
- Recognise and respect patients' values, beliefs, and culture. Respect diversity, treating all patients fairly, sensitively, and equally.
- Seek to understand patients' additional needs, including language, learning or physical and make reasonable adjustments to meet those additional needs.
- Understand your values and beliefs and ensure they do not impact upon your ability to provide appropriate clinical care.
- Refer a patient to an alternative provider, ensuring patient care is not jeopardised or compromised if you cannot provide a professional service or medicinal product.

Always act with professionalism.

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Use your professional judgement.
- Practise only when competent and fit to do so.
- Look after your mental and physical health, seeking support when appropriate.
- Not let any personal or commercial interests impact your professional judgement or acting in the patients' interests.
- Maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries including not treating family members.
- Use social media, in a way that maintains public confidence in pharmacy professionals.
- Keep appropriate records and store data in a way which ensures patient confidentiality.
- Demonstrate leadership and take responsibility for your actions.

- Conduct appropriate and regular risk assessments.
- Be a reflective and insightful practitioner.
- Co-operate with any employer, regulatory or legal investigations or proceedings.
- Ensure you have appropriate professional indemnity.

Communicate effectively and appropriately

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Listen to patients to understand their needs, values, wishes and preferences in relation to their care.
- Provide appropriate and adequate information to patients to ensure they are informed and empowered to make choices about their care.
- Take reasonable steps to understand patients' individual communication needs, making reasonable adjustments on how you communicate with them when necessary.
- Show empathy and compassion towards patients.
- Be polite and respectful towards people with different cultural backgrounds and beliefs.
- Respect and maintain patient confidentiality.
- Avoid making assumptions, recognise diversity and individual choice.

Work collaboratively with colleagues.

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Promote and encourage a culture of learning and improvement.

- Ensure colleagues you work with, especially those working in multidisciplinary teams, understand their scope of practice, competency and its limitations.
- When necessary, refer a patient or service user to another healthcare professional, whose expertise can better help the patient.
- Show leadership in the development, education and training of professional colleagues and Foundation Year Trainees.
- Share relevant knowledge, skills and expertise with colleagues to ensure appropriate health outcomes for patients.
- Support colleagues with performance or health issues sensitively, while having due regard for patient safety.
- Treat colleagues with respect and safeguard their dignity in a manner which is sensitive to differences.
- When appropriate, delegate tasks to appropriately trained colleagues.

Be open, honest and act with integrity.

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Provide information where appropriate to patients and colleagues.
- Be meticulous about the accuracy of information you provide to patients and colleagues, taking particular care not to mislead.
- Adhere to standards of personal conduct, inside and outside of the work environment, maintaining public confidence in the pharmacy profession at all times.
- Inform your regulator, employer, and any other relevant authority appropriately of any circumstances that may call into question their or another's fitness to practise, including issues relating to personal health.

**Raise concerns when things go wrong and deal appropriately
with any concerns raised.**

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Abide by the duty of candour - be open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress.
 - Apologise to the patient/s involved.
 - Offer an appropriate and effective remedy if one is available.
 - Continue to support the patient and keep them informed regarding an error in their care or treatment in line with the patient's wishes.
- Learn from mistakes and take action to rectify errors, reduce the risk of recurrence and improve practice going forward.
- Raise a concern if you become aware of practices, policies, systems or working conditions that may result in compromised patient care or other safety issues.
- Raise a concern if you become aware of a colleague or other healthcare professional whose performance or conduct may result in compromised patient care, other safety issues or brings into question their professional integrity.
- Raise a concern if you become aware of a colleague or other healthcare professional whose mental or physical health may result in compromised patient care or other safety issues.
- Deal appropriately with any concerns raised.
- Support any patient or colleague raising a legitimate concern appropriately.
- Respond appropriately and in line with the process to any concern raised or feedback given.

Maintain and develop professional skills and knowledge.

To meet this Standard, you will:

- Comply with continuing professional development requirements.
- Keep your knowledge and skills up to date, evidence based and relevant to your scope of practice.
- Identify development needs relevant to your scope of practice, address those needs and apply them.
- Ensure you keep your knowledge up to date in relation to any technological developments and governance arrangements which relate to your practice or have patient safety implications.
- Ensure you adhere to and keep up to date with all relevant legislation, standards and guidance which apply to your practice.

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