

Code of Ethics for Pharmacists

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CODE OF ETHICS FOR PHARMACISTS

Background

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Code of Professional Conduct (from 1998) has been revised to reflect:

- changes in legislation, changes to the health care landscape and evolution of professional pharmacy practice;
- the implementation of national registration for pharmacists;
- the reviews and subsequent release of PSA's *Professional Practice Standards* and the pharmacy profession's *National Competency Standards Framework for Pharmacists in Australia 2010*; and
- consistency with contemporary pharmacy practice in Australia.

The review and revision of the previous Code was conducted through a rigorous, multi-stage process involving: the PSA Board and Branches; a Code Review Working Group and panel of Expert Pharmacists nominated by PSA Branches;

PSA members; and external stakeholders including pharmacy, consumer and other health professional organisations and government bodies. The revised code will be known as the PSA Code of Ethics for Pharmacists (the 'PSA Code').

Status of this Code

All pharmacists registered with the Pharmacy Board of Australia (PBA) need to comply with the PBA's code of conduct which provides guidance on the ethical framework through which effective health services should be delivered. The PBA code contains important standards for practitioner behaviour on: providing good care, including shared decision-making; working with patients/clients, other practitioners and within the healthcare system; minimising risk; maintaining professional performance; professional behaviour and ethical conduct; ensuring practitioner health; teaching, supervising and assessing; and research.

The PBA has endorsed the PSA Code and advises pharmacists to be guided by the code(s) of ethics relevant to their practice in addition to the PBA code. The PBA, in its role of public protection, may use or refer to the PSA Code in cases involving the conduct or behaviour of pharmacists.

Purpose and scope of this Code

The PSA Code must be read in conjunction with other relevant documents such as: Federal and state/territory legislation; standards, codes and guidelines issued by the PBA; and guidelines and standards issued by professional organisations. Nothing in the PSA Code is to be construed as permitting breach of any law, or interpreted in any way which would discourage any pharmacist from complying with any legal obligation.

The PSA Code articulates the values of the pharmacy profession and expected standards of behaviour of pharmacists to consumers and society. It is designed to guide and support professional practice of all pharmacists. Note that the PBA's definition of "practice" (adapted below) applies here.

To practise as a pharmacist means undertaking any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a pharmacist. Practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes working in a direct nonclinical relationship with consumers; working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles; and any other roles that impact on safe, effective delivery of services in the profession and/or use their professional skills.

Structure and content of this Code

The PSA Code consists of nine principles covering five main areas of focus which are core to pharmacists and pharmacy practice. The principles capture philosophical concepts and form the foundation of the Code.

The Summary of Principles (p. 4) provides an overview of the entire Code, the nine principles aligned to areas of focus, and sub-text supporting each principle. The areas of focus associated with the principles are intended to promote a better understanding of the context and application of the principles to everyday practice. Although the principles are numbered and associated with a specific area of focus, they are of equal importance.

Following the Summary of Principles, the main section of the document further articulates each of the principles. A set of more detailed statements (Obligations) outline the standards of professional behaviour expected of a pharmacist.

Where warranted, the PSA Code will also be supported by separate documents providing additional detail and which can be updated as required. These will be referenced in the *Additional guidance* section.

Application of this Code

The principles contained in this Code apply to every pharmacist irrespective of the role, scope, level or location of practice. Clearly there will be instances where some principles may not be directly relevant to an individual pharmacist's usual practice, for example, where the area of focus is on business practices. However, it is expected that all pharmacists will embrace the underlying tenet of each principle and be responsible for propagating the profession's core values.

Intern pharmacists and pharmacy students will be exposed to the PSA Code and learn about various 'codes' of ethics relevant to their chosen profession. It is expected that intern pharmacists and pharmacy students comply with the PSA Code during periods of supervised practice (clinical placements).

All non-pharmacist personnel engaged in the pharmacy profession are strongly encouraged to comply with the principles of the PSA Code. Employers are encouraged to include the PSA Code as part of the employee induction process and regularly promote aspects of the Code. This will enhance rigour and promote confidence in the profession.

Additional guidance

The PSA will provide additional guidance to pharmacists on an ongoing basis to cover specific principles, areas of practice or issues as they arise or are identified. These may be provided as points or referenced (if substantial documents) in the *Additional guidance* section.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR PHARMACISTS – SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

AREA OF FOCUS	PRINCIPLE AND SUPPORTING TEXT
THE CONSUMER	<p>1. A pharmacist recognises the health and wellbeing of the consumer as their first priority. A pharmacist will utilise expert knowledge and provide care in a compassionate and professional manner.</p> <p>2. A pharmacist pays due respect for the autonomy and rights of consumers and encourages consumers to actively participate in decision-making. A pharmacist will, through informed consent, pay due respect to the dignity and privacy of the consumer including: respecting the consumer’s individuality; respecting their right to refuse advice or treatment; and ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of the consumer and information provided.</p>
THE COMMUNITY	<p>3. A pharmacist upholds the reputation and public trust of the profession. A pharmacist will not abuse the trust and respect of individuals and society.</p> <p>4. A pharmacist acknowledges the professional roles in and responsibilities to the wider community. A pharmacist will ensure responsible and accountable control and supply of therapeutic goods and contribute to public health and enhancing the quality use of medicines.</p>
THE PHARMACY PROFESSION	<p>5. A pharmacist demonstrates a commitment to the development and enhancement of the profession. A pharmacist will commit to advancing the profession through involvement in activities including: training staff; engaging in teaching; acting as a preceptor; mentoring students, interns and colleagues; engaging in discussions and participating in initiatives to develop the profession; and showing professional leadership.</p> <p>6. A pharmacist maintains a contemporary knowledge of pharmacy practice and ensures health and competence to practise. A pharmacist will recognise the importance of lifelong learning and self-development and their impact on professional competence. Further, a pharmacist is responsible for ensuring personal health to practise and supporting health professional colleagues in this regard.</p> <p>7. A pharmacist agrees to practise only under conditions which uphold the professional independence, judgement and integrity of themselves or others. A pharmacist will exercise professional autonomy, objectivity and independence and manage actual and potential situations of conflict of interest.</p>
BUSINESS PRACTICES	<p>8. A pharmacist conducts the business of pharmacy in an ethical and professional manner. A pharmacist will ensure business practices are conducted primarily in the best interest of the consumer, paying due respect to colleagues, while upholding the reputation of the profession.</p>
OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS	<p>9. A pharmacist works collaboratively with other health professionals to optimise the health outcomes of consumers. A pharmacist will consult and work cooperatively with other health care professionals to achieve expected or optimal health outcomes for the consumer.</p>

PRINCIPLES, OBLIGATIONS AND ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

In this section, each Principle is further articulated through Obligation statements which outline the standards of professional behaviour expected of a pharmacist.

In addition, points to guide the application of the PSA Code to everyday practice are provided. This *Additional guidance* section will be developed further over time as issues arise or are identified.

Principle 1 – Consumer First Priority

A pharmacist recognises the health and wellbeing of the consumer as their first priority.

It is important to reiterate that this principle applies to all pharmacists, even when not involved in providing direct care to consumers.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 1.1 Consider their duty of care to the consumer first and foremost.
- 1.2 Utilise expert knowledge and provide care in a compassionate and professional manner.
- 1.3 Recognise consumers who are particularly vulnerable and tailor the provision of care accordingly.
- 1.4 Act to prevent harm to the consumer.
- 1.5 Promote good health and wellbeing.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- When recommending a therapeutic product, any new evidence or lack of rigorous information must be carefully balanced with the consumer's choice and health status.
- Professional judgement must be exercised to prevent the supply of products likely to constitute an unacceptable hazard to health or the supply of unnecessary and/or excessive quantities of medicines or products, particularly those which have a potential for abuse or dependency.
- It is important to ensure consumers understand both risks and benefits associated with the chosen options of medication management and care. Clear directions and contacts should be provided for actions to be taken in the event of an adverse event or outcome.
- As the consumer's health care management may extend over more than one health/pharmacy sector/provider, it is important that pharmacists consider their liaison role and appropriately facilitate continuity of care for the consumer.

Principle 2 – Informed Consent

A pharmacist pays due respect for the autonomy and rights of consumers and encourages consumers to actively participate in decision-making.

Participation by consumers in health care decisions is a core principle of the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights. Consumers have the right to be informed about the choices available in health care and to be involved in making decisions based on these choices. Optimal health outcomes will depend on consumers being made aware of available options and expected outcomes (both positive and negative).

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 2.1 Respect the dignity of the consumer.
- 2.2 Recognise and respect consumer diversity, culture, beliefs, values and characteristics, and not discriminate on any grounds.
- 2.3 Through informed consent, encourage consumers to participate in shared decision-making and assist by providing information and advice relevant to the consumer's clinical needs in appropriate language and detail.
- 2.4 Respect the consumer's choice including the right to refuse treatment, care or advice, or to withdraw consent at any time.
- 2.5 Ensure compliance with the consumer's right to privacy.
- 2.6 Ensure confidentiality of the consumer's information.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Informed consent is based on provision of sufficient information to enable the consumer to make an informed decision about the medication or service. Coercion or lack of transparency are unacceptable.
- Provision of information must be tailored to the consumer's needs and purpose and in non-judgemental language.
- The consumer has a right to be offered and to acquire all relevant information regarding their medication. However there may be exceptions to this consumer right; any legislative requirements and professional privilege represent two examples.
- Protecting the consumer's right to privacy and confidentiality must occur not only in any interaction with the consumer but also in all communication between health practitioners regarding the consumer.
- A pharmacist has a right to decline provision of care based on a conscientious objection. However, this right should not prevent the consumer from accessing health care that they are entitled to. Therefore in these circumstances the pharmacist should inform the consumer of the objection and appropriately facilitate continuity of care for the consumer.
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. [*Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights*](#).

Principle 3 – Public Trust

A pharmacist upholds the reputation and public trust of the profession.

Pharmacists are regarded as role models and are granted certain professional privileges. In return, individual members of the community and the whole of society expect professional behaviour which warrants trust and respect.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 3.1 Demonstrate accepted standards of professional and personal behaviour.
- 3.2 Respect the trust that individuals and society place in the profession.
- 3.3 Provide accurate, truthful, relevant and independent information in a form that is appropriate for and not misleading to consumers.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Consumers place a high level of trust in pharmacists and expect sound and objective advice. Pharmacists should ensure they and their staff are not susceptible to inappropriate marketing influence that may adversely impact on their primary obligation to provide the most appropriate product, care or advice to meet consumer needs.
- Pharmacists should carefully consider how information provided to consumers has been received and interpreted. Information provided should not exploit a person's lack of knowledge or understanding.

Principle 4 – Quality Use of Medicines

A pharmacist acknowledges the professional roles in and responsibilities to the wider community.

Pharmacists commit to responsible and accountable control and supply of therapeutic goods and to contribute to public health and enhancing the quality use of medicines in partnership with individuals and the wider community. All aspects of pharmacy practice are underpinned by quality use of medicines principles and evidence-based practice.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 4.1 Ensure responsibility and accountability in the control, procurement, manufacture, handling and supply of therapeutic goods.
- 4.2 Promote the roles and responsibilities of pharmacists to the community.
- 4.3 Consider the use of and access to health resources in a fair and equitable manner.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- All reasonable care must be taken when disposing of medicinal products and chemicals. Medicines awaiting disposal must be securely stored.
- Timely reporting of suspected adverse events or reactions to therapeutic goods is also a professional responsibility and expectation.
- Pharmacists must be cognisant of the nature and level of responsibility the community expects of the pharmacy profession.
- Pharmacists have a responsibility to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of Australia's *National Medicines Policy* which are: timely access to the medicines that Australians need, at a cost individuals and the community can afford; medicines meeting appropriate standards of quality, safety and efficacy; quality use of medicines; and maintaining a responsible and viable medicines industry.

Principle 5 – Enhance the Profession

A pharmacist demonstrates a commitment to the development and enhancement of the profession.

All members of a respected and privileged profession have a role in the development, advancement and evolution of that profession. There are a range of activities and opportunities available to fulfil this responsibility which pharmacists may undertake to different extents at different stages of a professional career.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 5.1 Commit to advancing the profession through involvement in appropriate activities.
- 5.2 Encourage and support the ongoing development of staff and colleagues.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Examples of activities to be involved in include: professional development and training of staff; engaging in teaching; acting as a preceptor; mentoring students, interns and colleagues; engaging in discussions and participating in initiatives to develop the profession; developing and promoting professional roles and responsibilities to consumers, other health professionals and governments; and showing professional leadership.
- A preceptor pharmacist must act as a role model and actively engage in teaching and mentoring intern pharmacists and pharmacy students, not leaving these responsibilities solely to other staff members.
- A preceptor pharmacist must not compromise or manipulate time, effort or vulnerability of intern pharmacists.
- A preceptor pharmacist must demonstrate fairness in the interaction between preceptor and intern, and in the allocation of learning opportunities.

Principle 6 – Lifelong Learning

A pharmacist maintains a contemporary knowledge of pharmacy practice and ensures health and competence to practise.

All pharmacists should understand and accept the concept of lifelong learning and must commit to continuous learning and professional development as a means of advancing their practice and professional role in the community. Pharmacists also have a responsibility to identify impairment and ways to address the issues and seek or provide support.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 6.1 Recognise the importance of lifelong learning and self-development and their impact on professional competence, and commit to this concept in their current role, responsibility and scope of practice.
- 6.2 Recognise the benefits of self-assessment, or appraisal or review by others, of professional performance and respond appropriately to the outcomes.
- 6.3 Be responsible for ensuring personal health to practise and supporting health professional colleagues in this regard.
- 6.4 Recognise signs and behaviour in self and colleagues which may indicate a need for intervention in professional practice and referral for advice and support.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Pharmacy Board of Australia. [*Guidelines on continuing professional development*](#). 1 July 2010.
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. [*National Board guidelines for registered health practitioners: Guidelines for mandatory notifications*](#). 17 March 2014.

Principle 7 – Professional Accountability

A pharmacist agrees to practise only under conditions which uphold the professional independence, judgement and integrity of themselves or others.

A pharmacist is responsible for the professional decisions and contributions he or she makes in professional practice. Most practice settings involve working as part of a health care team which involves a pharmacist: working alongside professional pharmacist colleagues; supervising and being accountable for interns, students and support staff; or reporting to managers. Professional service delivery depends on successful team work derived from respect, good communication and cooperation.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 7.1 Exercise professional autonomy, objectivity and independence, and manage actual and potential situations of conflict of interest.
- 7.2 Behave in a manner which makes it clear that he or she is responsible and accountable for all decisions made and actions taken in professional practice.
- 7.3 Communicate with team members regarding each person's sphere of responsibility and line of reporting.
- 7.4 Ensure that the working environment and conditions are conducive to the optimal delivery of health care services and do not present a risk to the safety and care of consumers or colleagues.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- A pharmacist must not override the professional autonomy of pharmacists in his or her employ unless consumer safety may be compromised.
- It is advisable to refuse employment where a pharmacist's professional autonomy or judgement is denied or integrity is compromised in any way.
- Pharmacists engaged in research must appropriately consider responsible research practices and research ethics principles including any declaration or disclosure of interests (eg. grants from industry or shareholdings).
- National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. [*Australian code for the responsible conduct of research*](#). 2007.
- National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. [*National statement on ethical conduct in human research*](#). 2007. Updated May 2015.
- Pharmacists who employ other health practitioners should sight and authenticate credentials and be confident the activities and services provided complement the role of the pharmacist. The pharmacist shall maintain the professional role in the provision of quality use of medicines, dispensing of medications and counselling.
- Pharmacists are responsible for actions of staff under their supervision and arrangements must be made to ensure appropriate professional indemnity insurance coverage.
- It is recognised that sub-optimal working conditions may be unavoidable in some emergency situations (eg. following floods, fires or cyclones). Pharmacists should make their best efforts to safeguard consumers and colleagues under such circumstances.

Principle 8 – Ethical Business Practices

A pharmacist conducts the business of pharmacy in an ethical and professional manner.

Pharmacists are part of a diverse profession where contribution to health care service delivery occurs in many ways and through a variety of settings. In many cases, the contribution of professional expertise occurs in a health care setting involving business practices.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 8.1 Ensure business practices are conducted primarily in the best interest of the consumer.
- 8.2 Consider and recognise when potential conflicts of interest should be declared.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Examples of 'pharmacy health care service' models include (but are not limited to): operating a hospital pharmacy department; running a community pharmacy in a retail environment; or providing a consultant pharmacist service through the delivery of Home Medicines Reviews.
- The premises or location from which pharmacy health care services are delivered to consumers should reflect the professional character and health-related nature of the profession.
- When considering service or product availability from a pharmacy, the pharmacist will need to carefully balance issues such as consumer demand and commercial factors with quality, safety and efficacy.
- Vigilance over business practices may be particularly warranted by pharmacists in community pharmacies due to their existence in the retail environment where factors such as competitive prices and volume are key business drivers.
- Irrespective of the setting or model through which pharmacists practise, it is important to reiterate that the consumer's interests are always paramount while recognising the duality of interest of a pharmacist who may conduct a pharmacy business in the provision of a health care service.
- Parameters which guide any competitive marketing of therapeutic goods or health care services are: having the best interest of the consumer (Principle 1); upholding the reputation of the profession (Principle 3); and respecting colleagues (Principles 7 and 9).
- A pharmacist must refrain from inappropriate advertising, cognisant of the fact that pharmacy is a health care profession.
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. [Guidelines for advertising regulated health services](#). May 2014.
- [Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code 2007](#) provides that the marketing and advertising of therapeutic goods to consumers is conducted in a manner that promotes the quality use of therapeutic goods, is socially responsible and does not mislead or deceive the consumer.

Principle 9 – Collaboration

A pharmacist works collaboratively with other health professionals to optimise the health outcomes of consumers.

The provision of care by means of multidisciplinary teams aims to produce synergies and efficiencies through the contribution of respective health professional skills and expertise. Collaborative care implemented through good communication and cooperation can deliver enhanced efficiencies and better health outcomes for consumers, particularly in the context of an increasing demand for and complexity of health care.

OBLIGATIONS

A pharmacist must:

- 9.1 Exercise professional independence and judgement and be cognisant of own scope of professional practice when providing support and advice to other health professionals.
- 9.2 Respect and understand the expertise of other health professionals.
- 9.3 Consult and work cooperatively with other health professionals to achieve expected health outcomes for the consumer.
- 9.4 Establish good working relationships and promote agreed communication paths with other health professionals to enable the delivery of best possible outcomes.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- A pharmacist must ensure no conflict of interest encroaches on the relationship with any other health care provider (eg. sharing of financial gain from a referral or sale of a product or medication).
- A pharmacist must at all times refrain from expressing defamatory or unprofessional complimentary remarks in public about any consumers, colleagues or other health care providers.
- Working within your own scope of pharmacy practice and recognising the expertise of others should also facilitate appropriate referral processes thereby enhancing the multidisciplinary approach to optimising health outcomes for consumers.

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