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## GUIDE TO GOOD MEDICAL PRACTICE

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### **Introduction**

The following guidelines have been adopted with permission from the General Medical Council's publication "Good Medical Practice".

The Guide sets out general principles in relation to the practice of medicine. It is not exhaustive, and cannot cover all forms of professional practice or conduct which may bring your registration into question.

The Guide complements legislation, but it is not a substitute for the legislative provisions and in the event of any doubt, the legislative provisions take precedence.

Guidance on specific issues and areas of practice is contained in a number of policy statements in other documents produced by the Medical Council.

If serious problems arise in your practice of medicine, these are the standards against which you will be judged.

### **General Principles**

Patients must be able to trust doctors with their lives and well-being. To justify that trust, all doctors have a duty to maintain high standards of practice and care and at all times, maintain respect for human life. As a doctor, you should:

- do your best to establish and maintain a relationship of trust with your patient.
- make the care of the patient your primary concern;
- treat every patient politely and considerately;
- respect patients' dignity and privacy;
- listen to patients and respect their views;
- give patients information in a way they can understand;

- respect the right of patients to be fully involved in decisions about their care;
- keep professional knowledge and skills up to date;
- recognise the limits of your professional competence;
- respect and protect confidential information;
- make sure that personal beliefs do not prejudice your patients' care;
- act quickly to protect patients from risk if there is good reason to believe that you or a colleague may not be fit to practise;
- avoid abusing your position as a doctor;
- work with colleagues in the ways that best serve patients' interests;
- be honest and trustworthy; and
- maintain necessary medical indemnity cover.

All patients are entitled to good standards of practice and care from their doctors. Essential elements of this are clinical competence (possession of adequate knowledge and skill), its application in practice (clinical performance), observance of professional obligations, good relationships with colleagues and integrity in the conduct of business and research.

### **1. Clinical Competence / Performance**

#### **1.1 Good clinical care includes:**

- an adequate assessment of the patient's condition, based on the history and clinical signs and appropriate examination;
- where appropriate, providing or arranging investigations or treatment;
- when necessary, taking suitable and prompt action;
- when indicated, referring the patient to another practitioner.

#### **1.2 In providing care you should:**

- recognise and work within the limits of your clinical competence when making diagnoses and when giving or arranging treatment;
- be willing to consult colleagues;
- keep clear, accurate, and contemporaneous patient records which report the relevant clinical findings, the decisions made, the information given to patients and any drug or other treatment prescribed;
- keep colleagues well informed when sharing the care of patients;
- pay due regard to effectiveness of care and the use of resources;
- prescribe only the treatment, drugs, or appliances that serve the needs of patients;

- in emergency situations, offer your patients or members of the public any treatment that you could be reasonably expected to provide.

### **1.3 In order to maintain your competence (knowledge and skill) you must:**

- participate in educational activities, relevant to your area of practice which develop and maintain your competence and performance throughout your working life;
- observe and keep up to date with the laws and statutory codes of practice which affect your work.

### **1.4 In order to maintain your performance you should:**

- work with colleagues to monitor and maintain your awareness of the quality of the care you provide;
- take part in regular and systematic medical and clinical audit, and record all data carefully and honestly;
- respond to the results of audit to improve your practice, for example, by undertaking further training;
- respond constructively to assessments and appraisals of your professional competence and performance.

## **2. Professional Obligations**

### **2.1 Education, Teaching and Training**

- You should encourage the members of the public to be aware of and understand health issues and contribute to the education and training of other doctors, medical students and colleagues.
- If you have special responsibilities for teaching you should develop the skills, attitudes and practices of a competent teacher.
- You should make sure that students and junior colleagues are properly supervised.
- You should be objective when assessing the performance of those you have supervised or trained.

### 2.2 References

- When providing references for colleagues, your comments should include all relevant information which has a bearing on the colleague's competence, performance, reliability and conduct.

### 2.3 Maintaining trust

Successful relationships between doctors and patients depend on trust. To establish and maintain trust you should:

- listen to patients and respect their views;
- treat patients politely and considerately;
- respect patients' privacy and dignity;
- treat information about patients as confidential. (There may be circumstances where the public interest requires that confidentiality be breached. You should seek appropriate advice in these circumstances.)
- give patients full information about their condition, treatment and prognosis in a way they can understand. This information should be provided to those who have legal responsibility for a patient when that situation applies.
- respect the right of patients to be fully involved in all decisions about their care;
- wherever possible, be satisfied that the patient has understood what is proposed, and consents to it, before you provide treatment or investigate a patient's condition;
- respect the right of patients to decline treatment or decline to take part in teaching or research;
- respect the right of patients to a second opinion; and
- be readily accessible to patients and colleagues.

### 2.4 Putting Patients First

- You should give priority to the investigation and treatment of patients on the basis of clinical need.

- The investigations or treatment you provide or arrange should be based on your clinical judgment of the patient's needs and the likely effectiveness. You should not allow your views about a patient's lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, gender, sexuality, age, social, economic or insurance status, to prejudice the treatment you provide or arrange.
- If you feel that your beliefs might affect the treatment you provide, you should explain this to patients, tell them of their right to see another doctor, and where appropriate, refer them to another doctor.
- You should not refuse or delay treatment because you believe that patients' actions have contributed to their condition, or because you may be putting yourself at risk. If a patient poses a risk to your health or safety, you may take reasonable steps to protect yourself before investigating their condition or providing treatment.
- You must act in your patients' best interests when making referrals and providing or arranging treatment or care. You must not ask for or accept any inducement, gift or hospitality which may affect or be seen to affect your judgment. You must not offer such inducements to colleagues.

### 2.5 If Things Go Wrong

Patients who complain about the care or treatment they have received have a right to expect a prompt and appropriate response. You have a professional responsibility to:

- deal with complaints constructively and honestly;
- co-operate with any complaints procedure which applies to your practice;
- ensure that a patient's complaint does not prejudice the care or treatment you provide or arrange for that patient; (It may sometimes be wise to arrange an appropriate referral to another doctor.)
- act immediately to put matters right, if that is possible if a patient under your care has suffered serious harm, through misadventure or for any other reason. You should explain fully to the patient what has happened and the likely short and long-term effects. When appropriate, you should offer an apology. This explanation should be provided to those who have legal responsibilities for a patient when that situation arises.
- co-operate fully with any formal inquiry into the treatment of a patient, subject to appropriate advice from your medical defence organisation. You should not withhold relevant information. Similarly, you must assist the coroner when an inquest or inquiry is held into a patient's death;

### **2.6 When a patient dies, you should;**

- Where appropriate, explain, to the best of your knowledge, the reasons for, and the circumstances of the death to those with parental responsibility, the patient's partner or next of kin.

### **2.7 When the doctor / patient relationship deteriorates, you should:**

- In the circumstances in which you find it necessary to end a professional relationship with a patient, you should tell the patient why you have made the decision;
- Assist the patient to make prompt arrangements for their continuing care, should you terminate the relationship. You should transfer records or other information to the patient's new doctor on request.

### **2.8 Abuse of your professional position**

You must not abuse your patients' trust. You must not, for example:

- use your position to establish improper personal relationships with patients or their close relatives;
- put pressure on your patients to give or lend money or to provide other benefits to you or other people;
- improperly disclose or misuse confidential information about patients;
- give patients, or recommend to them, an investigation or treatment which you know is not in their best interests;
- deliberately withhold appropriate investigation, treatment or referral.
- put pressure on patients to change their insurance status.
- enable anyone who is not a registered doctor to carry out tasks which require the knowledge and skills of a doctor.

### **2.9 Your duty to protect all patients**

In order to protect your patients and the public, you should:

- be vigilant in identifying doctors or other colleagues whose health, conduct or performance is a threat to the public;

- do your best to find out the facts, then, if necessary, notify an appropriate person such as the hospital chief executive or the Medical Council. Your comments about colleagues must be honest. If you are not sure what to do, ask an experienced colleague or contact the Medical Council or your defence organisation for advice. The safety of patients must come first at all times.

### **2.10 If your own health may put patients at risk**

If you have a serious condition which you could pass on to patients, or if your judgment or performance could be significantly affected by a condition or illness, you should consult and follow advice of a suitably qualified medical practitioner on the necessary tests, treatment and on modifications to your clinical practice.

Do not rely on your own assessment of the risks to the patient.

If in doubt, you will find more advice on what to do if you believe that you or a colleague (including a medical practitioner for whom you are providing medical care) may be placing patients at risk in, you should contact the Medical Council.

### **2.11 Providing information about your services**

If you publish or broadcast information about services you provide, you must:

- ensure that the information is factual and verifiable;
- provide information in a way that conforms with legislation;
- ensure that the information is not false, misleading or deceptive and that it does not create an unjustified expectation of beneficial treatment or promote the unnecessary or inappropriate use of medical services;
- avoid making claims about the quality of your services or compare your services with those your colleagues provide;
- not offer guarantees of cures, nor exploit patients' vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge.

## **3. Working with colleagues**

- You must always treat your colleagues fairly, and in accordance with anti-discrimination laws. You should not allow your views of colleagues' lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, gender, sexuality, or age prejudice your professional relationship with them.
- You must not make any patient doubt the knowledge or skills of colleagues by making unnecessary or unsustainable comments about them.

### 3.1 Working in teams

Health care is increasingly provided by multi-disciplinary teams, although you remain accountable for your professional conduct and the care you provide. You should:

- work constructively and respect the skills and contributions of all team members;
- endeavour to resolve disagreement within the team. If you believe that the decision would harm the patient, tell someone who can take action. If necessary, and as a last resort take action yourself to protect the patient's safety or health.

**If you are a team leader, you should:**

- take responsibility for ensuring that the team provides care which is safe, effective and efficient;
- do your best to make sure that the whole team understands the need to provide a polite, responsive and accessible service and to treat patient information as confidential;
- make sure that colleagues understand their role and responsibilities in the team;
- work to improve your skills as a team leader.

### 3.2 Arranging cover

- You should be satisfied that when you are off duty, suitable arrangements are made for your patients' medical care. These arrangements should include effective handover procedures and clear communication between doctors.
- You should satisfy yourself that doctors who stand in for you have the qualifications, experience, knowledge and skills to perform the duties for which they will be responsible.

### 3.3 Coordinating a patient's care

It is in patients' best interests for one doctor, usually a general practitioner, to be fully informed about, and responsible for maintaining continuity of a patient's medical care. The medical practitioner coordinating care should:

- be aware of the range of specialist services available to your patients;
- actively coordinate a patient's care, or assure yourself that this task is being undertaken by another medical practitioner.

### 3.4 Delegation

Delegation involves asking a nurse, doctor, medical student or other health care worker to provide treatment or care on your behalf. When you delegate care or treatment you should:

- be sure that the person to whom you delegate is competent to carry out the procedure or provide the therapy involved. You should always pass on all relevant information about the patient's history and current condition and provide any necessary supervision.

### 3.5 Referral

When you refer a patient for care or treatment you should:

- Be sure that the person to whom you refer a patient is competent to carry out the procedure or provide the therapy involved;
- Unless the patient objects, tell the referring doctor the results of the investigations, the treatment provided and any other information necessary for the continuing care of the patient.

## 4. Probity in professional practice

### 4.1 Financial and commercial dealings

You must be honest in financial and commercial matters relating to your work and should obtain informed financial consent when possible.

### 4.2 Financial interests in hospitals, nursing homes and other medical organisations

- If you have financial or commercial interests in organisations providing health care or in pharmaceutical or other biomedical companies, these must not affect the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients.
- If you have a financial or commercial interest in an organisation or hospital to which you plan to refer a patient for treatment or investigation, you must tell the patient about such interest.

### 4.3 Accepting gifts or other inducements

Because of the perception or potential for your practice to be influenced, you must not ask for or accept:

- any material gifts or loans from companies that sell or market drugs or appliances;
- fees for agreeing to meet sales representatives.

### 4.4 Signing certificates and other documents

- You must take reasonable steps to verify any statement before you sign a document;
- You must not sign documents which you believe to be false or misleading;
- You must complete medico-legal and insurance reports in timely, accurate and unbiased manner.

### 4.5 Research

If you take part in clinical drug trials or other research involving patients or volunteers, you should:

- ensure that the research protocol has been approved by a properly constituted research ethics committee;
- conduct all research with honesty and integrity;
- ensure that the individual has given informed, written consent to take part in the trial;
- ensure that the research is not contrary to the individual's interests;
- seek advice where your research involves children or adults who are not able to make decisions for themselves.
- follow all aspects of the research protocol;
- accept only those payments approved by a research ethics committee;
- report evidence of fraud or misconduct in research to an appropriate person or authority.

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