

**PROTECTING PATIENTS GUIDING DOCTORS**  
**DUTIES & RESPONSABILITIES**  
**(General Medical Council, United Kingdom)**

Being a doctor gives you certain rights and privileges. In return you must fulfill the duties and responsibilities of a doctor. The principles of good medical practice and the standards of competence, care, and conduct expected of you in all aspects of your professional work, are described in this booklet. They apply to all doctors. If serious problems arise which call your conduct into question, these are the standards against which you will be judged.

**Providing a good Standard of Practice and Care**

1. All patients are entitled to good standards of practice and care from their doctors. Essential elements of this are professional competence; good relations with patients, respect for the patient's autonomy and good relations with colleagues; and observance of professional ethical obligations.

**Good Clinical Care must include:**

- An adequate assessment of the patient's condition, based on the history and physical examination;
  - Provide for appropriate investigations;
  - Provide for appropriate treatment;  
Referring the patient to another practitioner, when indicated.
2. In providing for care you must:
    - Work within the limits of your professional competence;
    - Be willing to consult with colleagues;
    - Be competent when making a diagnosis or providing treatment;
    - Keep clear, accurate, medical records which report the relevant clinical findings, the decisions made, and any drugs or treatment given;
    - Keep your colleagues well informed when sharing the care of patients;
    - Pay due regard to efficacy and the use of resources;

- Prescribe only the drugs, treatments and appliances that will serve the patient's needs.
- Make sure that your prescriptions are written correctly and clearly;
- Abide by the hospital rules, protocols and standard practice.

## **Maintaining Good Medical Practice**

### **Keeping up to date**

3. You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life. In particular, you should take part regularly in educational activities, which develop your competence and performance and read the important medical journals in your field of interest.
4. Law governs some parts of medical practice. You must observe and keep up to date with the laws and codes of conduct.

### **Maintaining your performance**

5. You must work with colleagues to monitor and maintain your awareness of the quality of the care you provide, in particular you must:
  - Take part in regular and systematic clinical audit, recording your findings honestly, where necessary you must respond to the results of audit to improve your practice.
  - Respond constructively to assessments and evaluations of your professional competence and performance.

### **Teaching and Training**

6. You must contribute to the education and training of medical students and other doctors
7. You must make sure your junior colleagues are well supervised during training
8. You must be honest and objective when assessing the performance of those you are training.

### **Maintaining trust and Professional relationships**

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

- Listen to patients and respect their views;
  - Treat patients politely;
  - Respect patient's privacy and dignity;
  - Give patients the information they request about the diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. You should provide this information to those with parental responsibility where patients are less than 18 years old. In principle the patient has the right to know his diagnosis and has the right to keep his diagnosis confidential even from his family.
  - However we recommend that caution should be exercised in disclosing information that is distressing to the patient. The patient's family should be contacted and the diagnosis discussed with them prior to its disclosure to the patient, unless the patient has asked you not to discuss his diagnosis with anybody.
  - Be satisfied that, the patient has understood what is proposed and consents to it before treatment is started;
  - Respect the right of patients to be fully involved in decisions about their care;
  - Respect the patients right to decline treatment or decline to take part in teaching or research;
  - Respect the right of patients to a second opinion;
  - Be readily accessible to patients and colleagues when you are on duty.
10. The investigations and treatment you provide must be based on your clinical judgment of the patient's needs and the likely effectiveness of the treatment. You must not allow your views about a patients culture, beliefs, race, color, gender, age, social status, or perceived economic worth, to influence the treatment you provide.

### **If things go wrong**

11. Patients who complain about the care and treatment they have received have a right to expect a prompt and appropriate response. As a doctor you have a responsibility to deal with the complaint constructively and honestly. You should cooperate with any complaint procedure, which applies, to your work. You must not allow a patient's complaint influence the care or treatment you provide to the patient.
12. If a patient under your care has suffered serious harm, you should act immediately to put matters right. You should explain to the patient and his family what has happened and the likely effects.

### **Disclosure of Medical Information**

13. All Medical information about your patient shall be treated as confidential and shall not be disclosed other than to the patient, except with the patients consent. However disclosure is legitimate in the following circumstances

- Disclosure to colleagues and other health professionals for the purpose of treatment
- Disclosure for research and teaching purposes;
- Disclosure pursuant to a Court Order which shall be addressed through the Medical Director;
- Disclosure to the family of an incompetent person;
- Disclosure in the public interest, this includes:
- Disclosure of notifiable diseases
- Disclosure to the family of a patient that he has a communicable disease
- Disclosure for public safety purposes ‘ in relation to vulnerable persons in dangerous occupations as airline pilots or public transport drivers, if found to suffer from from epilepsy or other incapacitating disease.
- Disclosure of a patient who is a threat to the safety of the public or a particular individual by reason of his mental disturbance.
- With the exception of disclosure to the family, all other disclosures should be to the Medical Director through the Chairman of the Department.

### **Abuse of your Professional position**

14. You must not abuse your patient’s trust.

#### **You must not:**

- Use your position to establish improper personal relationships with patients or their relatives;
- Recommend an investigation or treatment that you know is not in the best interest of the patient

- Put pressure on patient to accept private treatment, or otherwise promote your own private practice.
- Induce patients to use only the Medication or device of a certain trademark, unless it is for legitimate reasons.

### **Your Duty to protect all patients**

15. You must protect patients when you believe that a doctor's or colleague conduct or performance is a threat to them. Before taking action, you should do your best to find out the facts, then if necessary tell an appropriate person as the Medical Director your comments on your colleague. **The safety of the patient must always come first.**

### **Working with colleagues**

16. You must always treat your colleagues fairly and with respect
17. You must not make any patient doubt a colleague's knowledge or skills by making degrading comments about them.

### **Working in Teams**

18. Ensure that the Team provides care that is safe, effective and efficient. Work effectively to achieve high standards of care.
19. When you work as a Team you still remain accountable as a person for your professional conduct and the care you provide.

### **Arranging cover**

20. You must be satisfied that, when you are off duty, suitable arrangements are made for your patient's care. These arrangements include effective hand over procedures and clear communication between doctors.

### **Delegation and referral**

21. Delegation involves asking nurses, doctors, or other allied health personnel to provide care on your behalf. When you delegate, you must be sure that that the person to whom you delegate is competent to carry out the procedure. You are in fact responsible for the overall management of your patient.
22. Referral involves transferring some of the responsibility for the patient care, usually for a particular purpose, such as additional investigations, care or treatment, which falls outside your competence. You still retain overall responsibility for the management of your patient

### **Providing Information about your Services**

23. If you publish or broadcast information about the services you provide, the information must be factual and verifiable.
24. The information you publish must not compare your services with those your colleagues provide. It must not, in any way, offer guarantees of cure, nor exploit patient vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge.

### **Conflict of Interest**

25. You must act in the patients best interest when making referrals or arranging treatment or care. You must not accept any inducement, gift or hospitality, which may affect or be seen to affect your judgment. You should not offer such inducements to colleagues.

### **Financial Interests in Hospitals, Nursing Homes and other Medical Organizations**

26. If you have commercial or financial interests in an organization providing health care these must not affect the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients.
27. If you plan to refer the patient to that organization, you must tell the patient about your interest in it.

### **Accepting Gifts and Hospitality**

28. You should not accept any gift or loan, except those of insignificant value from companies that sell or market drugs
29. You may accept personal travel grants and hospitality from companies for conferences or educational meetings as long as the main purpose of the event is educational.

### **Signing Certificates and other Documents**

30. You must take reasonable steps to verify that statements are true before you sign any document.
31. You are fully responsible for the safekeeping of your stamp, keep it in your pocket or locked, as your accountable legally for its misuse.

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