
Your duties as a registrant

Standards
of conduct,
performance
and ethics

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Foreword

We are pleased to present the Health and Care Professions Council's standards of conduct, performance and ethics.

We review the standards of conduct, performance and ethics regularly to ensure that the standards are relevant to current practice, that they continue to effectively incorporate equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) commitments and that they are clearly understood by those who use them.

These new, revised standards are a result of our most recent review of the standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The revised standards reflect the extent of developments in health and care practice, in line with feedback from our public consultation and stakeholder engagement throughout the review.

The review identified key themes, which the new standards of conduct, performance and ethics embed. These focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, communication, duty of candour, upskilling and training responsibilities and managing existing health conditions and disabilities in the workplace.

Our changes to equality, diversity and inclusion in the standards include an expectation of registrants to be proactive in thinking about the care they can offer. The updated standards have a specific emphasis on making sure practice is inclusive for all service users. We have also made changes to the wording of the standards to move registrants away from a passive understanding of the standards and towards active implementation of them.

The review process and consultation produced valuable feedback and we are grateful to all those who gave their time to help us to develop the new standards. We are confident that the standards are fit for purpose and reflect safe and effective professional practice.

These standards are effective from 1 September 2024.

Registrants must:

1. Promote and protect the interests of service users and carers
2. Communicate appropriately and effectively
3. Work within the limits of your knowledge and skills
4. Delegate appropriately
5. Respect confidentiality
6. Manage risk
7. Report concerns about safety
8. Be open when things go wrong
9. Be honest and trustworthy
10. Keep records of your work

Introduction

About us

We are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), a regulator set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills, knowledge and behaviour. The people on our Register are referred to as 'registrants'.

About this document

This document sets out the standards of conduct, performance and ethics. These standards set out, in general terms, how we expect our registrants to behave. They outline what the public should expect from their health and care professional. They also help us to make decisions about the character of professionals who apply to our Register and are used if someone raises a concern about a registrant's practice. When things go wrong, they help us to decide whether it is necessary to act.

We also expect registrants to meet the HCPC standards of proficiency and standards for continuing professional development. We publish these in separate documents, which you can find on our website.

We currently regulate the following 15 professions:

- Arts therapists
- Biomedical scientists
- Chiropodists / podiatrists
- Clinical scientists
- Dietitians
- Hearing aid dispensers
- Occupational therapists
- Operating department practitioners
- Orthoptists
- Paramedics
- Physiotherapists
- Practitioner psychologists
- Prosthetists / orthotists
- Radiographers
- Speech and language therapists

Our registrants work in a range of different settings, which include direct practice, management, education, research and roles in industry. They also work with a variety of different people, including patients, clients, carers and other professionals. In this document we have tried to use terms which everyone can understand. Some terms which have a specific meaning in this guide are explained in the glossary at the end of this booklet.

The standards of conduct performance and ethics are set out in ten headings, with further detail in subheadings. We have numbered the standards so that you can refer to them more easily. The standards are not hierarchical, are all equally important for practice and are inter-related.

What the standards mean for different groups

Registrants and applicants

If you are registered with us, you must make sure that you are familiar with the standards and that you continue to meet them. It is important that you read and understand this document. If you are applying to be registered, you will need to sign a declaration to confirm that you will keep to the standards once you are registered.

As a registrant, you are personally responsible for the way you behave. You will need to use your judgement so that you make informed and reasonable decisions and meet the standards. You must always be prepared to justify your decisions and actions.

Making informed and reasonable decisions might include getting advice and support from colleagues, education providers, employers, professional bodies, trade unions or other people. In particular, we recognise the valuable role professional bodies play in representing and promoting the interests of their members. This often includes providing guidance and advice about good practice, which can help you meet the standards.

Learners

The standards also apply to you if you are a learner on a HCPC-approved programme. We have published another document, 'Guidance on conduct and ethics for students'¹, which sets out what the standards mean for you.

Service users, carers and the public

If you are receiving care, treatment or other services from one of our registrants, or you might do so in the future, the standards will help you to understand how our registrants should behave towards you. The standards will also be helpful if you are a carer.

On the rare occasions that something goes wrong, anyone can raise a concern through our fitness to practise process (see page 17). We can take action when there are serious concerns about a health and care professional's knowledge, skills or behaviour. We use the standards of conduct, performance and ethics to help us decide whether we need to take action to protect the public.

¹ www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/guidance/guidance-on-conduct-and-ethics-for-students/

Meeting the standards

It is important that you meet these standards and practise lawfully, safely and effectively. However, we do not dictate how you should meet the standards. There is normally more than one way in which each standard can be met and this will depend upon your working context. The way in which you meet the standards may also change over time.

If your practice is called into question, we will consider these standards (and the standards of proficiency) in deciding what action, if any, we need to take. You must always be prepared to justify your decisions and actions.

Language

We recognise that our registrants work in a range of different settings, which include direct practice, management, education, research and roles in industry. We also recognise that the use of terminology can be an emotive issue.

Our registrants work with very different people and use different terms to describe the groups that use, or are affected by, their services. Some of our registrants work with patients, others with clients and others with service users. The terms that you use will depend on how and where you work. We have used terms in these standards which we believe best reflect the groups that you work with.

These standards may change in the future

We have produced these standards after speaking to our stakeholders and holding a formal public consultation.

We will continue to listen to our stakeholders and will keep our standards under regular review. Therefore, we may make further changes in the future to take into account changes in practice.

We will always publicise any changes to the standards that we make by, for instance, publishing notices on our website and informing professional bodies.

Standards of conduct,
performance and ethics

The standards

1. Promote and protect the interests of service users and carers

Treat service users with respect

1.1 You must treat service users and carers as individuals, respecting their privacy and dignity.

1.2 You must work in partnership with service users and carers, involving them, where appropriate, in decisions about the care, treatment or other services to be provided.

1.3 You must empower and enable service users, where appropriate, to play a part in maintaining their own health and wellbeing and support them so they can make informed decisions.

Make sure you have consent

1.4 You must make sure that you have valid consent, which is voluntary and informed, from service users who have capacity to make the decision or other appropriate authority before you provide care, treatment or other services.

Challenge discrimination

1.5 You must treat people fairly and be aware of the potential impact that your personal values, biases and beliefs may have on the care, treatment or other services that you provide to service users and carers, and in your interactions with colleagues.

1.6 You must take action to ensure that your personal values, biases and beliefs do not lead you to discriminate against service users, carers or colleagues. Your personal values, biases and beliefs must not detrimentally impact the care, treatment or other services that you provide.

1.7 You must raise concerns about colleagues if you think that they are treating people unfairly, that their personal values, biases and beliefs have led them to discriminate against service users, carers or colleagues, or if they have detrimentally impacted the care, treatment or other services that they provide. This should be done following the relevant procedures within your practice and should maintain the safety of all involved.

Maintain appropriate boundaries

1.8 You must consider the potential impact that the position of power and trust you hold as a health and care professional may have on individuals when in social or personal settings.

1.9 You must take action to set and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with service users, carers and colleagues.

1.10 You must use appropriate methods of communication to provide care and other services related to your practice.

1.11 You must ensure that existing personal relationships do not impact professional decisions.

1.12 You must not abuse your position as a health and care practitioner to pursue personal, sexual, emotional or financial relationships with service users, carers or colleagues.

2. Communicate appropriately and effectively

Communicate with service users and carers

2.1 You must be polite and considerate.

2.2 You must listen to service users and carers and take account of their needs and wishes.

2.3 You must give service users and carers the information they want or need, in a way they can understand.

2.4 You must make sure that all practicable steps are taken to meet service users' and carers' language and communication needs.

2.5 You must use all forms of communication responsibly when communicating with service users and carers.

Work with colleagues

2.6 You must work in partnership with colleagues, sharing your skills, knowledge and experience where appropriate, for the benefit of service users and carers.

2.7 You must share relevant information, where appropriate, with colleagues involved in the care, treatment or other services provided to a service user.

2.8 You must treat your colleagues in a professional manner showing them respect and consideration.

2.9 You must use all forms of communication with colleagues and other health and care professionals responsibly, including media-sharing networks and social networking sites.

Social media and networking sites

2.10 You must use media-sharing networks and social networking sites responsibly.

2.11 You must make reasonable checks to ensure information you share is accurate, true, does not mislead the public and is in line with your duty to promote public health, when sharing information on media-sharing networks and social networking sites.

2.12 You must use media-sharing networks and social networking sites responsibly, maintaining professional boundaries at all times and protecting service user/carer privacy.

3. Work within the limits of your knowledge and skills

Keep within your scope of practice

3.1 You must only practise in the areas where you have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to meet the needs of a service user safely and effectively.

3.2 You must undertake additional training to update your knowledge, skills and experience if you wish to widen your scope of practice.

3.3 You must refer a service user to an appropriate practitioner if the care, treatment or other services they need are beyond your scope of practice. This person must hold the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to meet the needs of the service user safely and effectively.

Maintain and develop your knowledge and skills

3.4 You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development.

3.5 You must keep up to date with and follow the law, our guidance and other requirements relevant to your practice.

3.6 You must ask for feedback and use it to improve your practice.

4. Delegate appropriately

Delegation, oversight and support

4.1 You must only delegate work to someone who has the knowledge, skills and experience needed to carry it out safely and effectively.

4.2 You must continue to provide appropriate supervision and support to those you delegate work to.

5. Respect confidentiality

Using information

5.1 You must treat information about service users as confidential.

Disclosing information

5.2 You must only disclose confidential information if:

- you have permission;
- the law allows this;
- it is in the service user's best interests; or
- it is in the public interest, such as if it is necessary to protect public safety or prevent harm to other people.

6. Manage risk

Identify and minimise risk

6.1 You must take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of harm to service users, carers and colleagues, as far as possible.

6.2 You must not do anything, or allow someone else to do anything, which could put the health or safety of a service user, carer or colleague at unacceptable risk.

Manage your health

6.3 You must take responsibility for assessing whether changes to your physical and/or mental health will detrimentally impact your ability to practise safely and effectively. If you are unsure about your ability to do so, ask an appropriate health and care professional to make an assessment on your behalf.

6.4 You must adjust your practice if your physical and/or mental health will detrimentally impact your ability to practise safely and effectively. These adjustments must promote safe and effective practice. Where it is not possible to make these adjustments within your scope of practice, you must stop practising.

7. Report concerns about safety

Report concerns

7.1 You must report any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of service users promptly and appropriately.

7.2 You must support and encourage others to report concerns and not prevent anyone from raising concerns.

7.3 You must take appropriate action if you have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children or vulnerable adults.

7.4 You must make sure that the safety and wellbeing of service users always comes before any professional or other loyalties.

7.5 You must raise concerns regarding colleagues if you witness bullying, harassment or intimidation of a service user, carer or another colleague. This should be done following the relevant procedures within your practice or organisation and maintaining the safety of all involved.

Follow up concerns

7.6 You must follow up concerns you have reported and, if necessary, escalate them.

7.7 You must acknowledge and act on concerns raised to you, investigating, escalating or dealing with those concerns where it is appropriate for you to do so.

8. Be open when things go wrong

Openness with service users and carers

8.1 You must be open, honest and candid when something has gone wrong with the care, treatment or other services that you provide, by:

- where applicable, alerting your employer of what has gone wrong and following the relevant internal procedures;
- informing service users and where appropriate carers, or where you do not have direct access to these individuals the lead clinician, that something has gone wrong;
- providing service users and carers with a detailed explanation of the circumstances in which things have gone wrong and the likely impact; and
- taking action to correct the mistake if possible and detailing this action to the service user and where appropriate, their carer.

8.2 You must apologise to a service user and/or their carer when something has gone wrong with the care, treatment or other services that you provide.

Deal with concerns and complaints

8.3 You must support service users and carers who want to raise concerns about the care, treatment or other services they have received.

8.4 You must give a helpful and honest response to anyone who complains about the care, treatment or other services they have received.

9. Be honest and trustworthy

Personal and professional behaviour

9.1 You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public's trust and confidence in you and your profession.

9.2 You must be honest about your experience, qualifications and skills.

9.3 You must take reasonable steps to make sure that any promotional activities you are involved in are accurate and are not likely to mislead.

9.4 You must declare issues that might create conflicts of interest and make sure that they do not influence your judgement.

Important information about your conduct and competence

9.5 You must tell us as soon as possible if:

- you accept a caution from the police or you have been charged with, or found guilty of, a criminal offence;
- another organisation responsible for regulating a health or social care profession has taken action or made a finding against you; or
- you have had any restriction placed on your practice, or been suspended or dismissed by an employer, because of concerns about your conduct or competence.

9.6 You must co-operate with any investigation into your conduct or competence, the conduct or competence of others, or the care, treatment or other services provided to service users.

10. Keep records of your work

Keep accurate records

10.1 You must keep full, clear and accurate records for everyone you care for, treat or provide other services to.

10.2 You must complete all records promptly and as soon as possible after providing care, treatment or other services.

10.3 You must keep records secure by protecting them from loss, damage or inappropriate access.

Fitness to practise

When we say someone is ‘fit to practise’, we mean that they have the skills, knowledge, character and health they need to practise their profession safely and effectively.

We can consider concerns which members of the public, employers, professionals, the police and other people raise about a registrant’s fitness to practise. When we are deciding whether we need to take any action against a registrant to protect the public, we look at whether the registrant has met these standards.

You can find out more information about our fitness to practise process using our fitness to practise fact sheets² and in the ‘How we investigate’³ section of our website.

² www.hcpc-uk.org/concerns/how-we-can-support-you/fact-sheets/

³ www.hcpc-uk.org/concerns/how-we-investigate/

Glossary

Apologising

Making it clear that you are sorry about what has happened. The HCPC does not regard an apology, of itself, as an admission of liability or wrongdoing.

Carer

Anyone who looks after, or provides support to, a family member, partner or friend.

Care, treatment or other services

A general term to describe the different work that our registrants carry out.

Colleague

Other health and care professionals, students and trainees, support workers, professional carers and others involved in providing care, treatment or other services to service users.

Conduct

A health and care professional's behaviour.

Consent

Permission for a registrant to provide care, treatment or other services, given by a service user, or someone acting on their behalf, after receiving all the information they reasonably need to make that decision.

Delegate

To ask someone else to carry out a task on your behalf.

Disclose

In these standards, this refers to making a formal decision to share information about a service user with others, such as the police.

Discriminate

To unfairly treat a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people. This includes treating others differently because of your views about their lifestyle, culture or social or economic status, as well as the characteristics protected by law: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Escalate

To pass on a concern about a service user's safety or wellbeing to someone who is better able to act on it, for example, a more senior colleague, a manager or a regulator.

Ethics

The values that guide a person's behaviour or judgement.

Practitioner

A health and care professional who is currently practising in their profession.

Refer

To ask someone else to provide care, treatment or other services which are beyond your scope of practice or, where relevant, because the service user has asked for a second opinion.

Scope of practice

The areas in which a registrant has the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to practise safely and effectively.

Service user

Anyone who uses or is affected by the services of registrants, for example, patients or clients.

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policy@hcpc-uk.org

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