

Good Medical Practice 2012



General
Medical
Council

Regulating doctors
Ensuring good medical practice

Draft for consultation

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The duties of a doctor registered with the General Medical Council

Patients must be able to trust doctors with their lives and health. To justify that trust you must show respect for human life and ensure your practice meets the standards expected of you in relation to the following:

Knowledge, skills and performance

- Make the care of your patient your first concern
- Provide a good standard of practice and care
 - Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date
 - Recognise and work within the limits of your competence

Safety and quality

- Act without delay if you have good reason to believe that you or a colleague may be putting patients at risk
- Protect and promote the health of patients and the public

Communication, partnership and teamwork

- Treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity
 - Treat patients politely and considerately
 - Respect patients' right to confidentiality

- Work in partnership with patients
 - Listen to patients and respond to their concerns and preferences
 - Give patients the information they want or need in a way they can understand
 - Respect patients' right to reach decisions with you about their treatment and care
 - Support patients in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their health
- Work with colleagues in the ways that best serve patients' interests

Maintaining trust

- Be honest and open and act with integrity
 - Never discriminate unfairly against patients or colleagues
 - Never abuse your patients' trust in you or the public's trust in the profession.

You are personally accountable for your professional practice and must always be prepared to justify your decisions and actions.

Introduction

- 1 Patients need good doctors. Good doctors make the care of their patients their first concern: they are competent, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, establish and maintain good relationships with patients and colleagues,* are honest and trustworthy, and act with integrity.
- 2 Good doctors work in partnership with patients and respect their rights to privacy and dignity. They treat each patient as an individual. They do their best to ensure that all patients receive good care and treatment that will support them to live as well as possible, whatever their illness or disability.
- 3 The guidance that follows describes what is expected of all doctors registered with the GMC. It is your responsibility to be familiar with *Good Medical Practice* and to follow the guidance it contains. It is guidance, not a statutory code, so you must use your judgement in applying the principles to the various situations you will face as a doctor, whether or not you hold a licence to practise, whatever field of medicine you work in, and whether or not you routinely see patients. You must be prepared to explain and justify your decisions and actions.
- 4 In *Good Medical Practice* the terms 'you must' and 'you should' are used in the following ways.
 - 'You must' is used for an overriding duty or principle.
 - 'You should' is used when we are providing an explanation of how you will meet the overriding duty.
 - 'You should' is also used where the duty or principle will not apply in all situations or circumstances, or where there are factors outside your control that affect whether or how you can comply with the guidance.
- 5 Serious or persistent failure to follow this guidance will put your registration at risk.

* Anyone a doctor works with, whether or not they are also doctors.

Domain 1: Knowledge, skills and performance

Maintain your professional performance

- 6 You must keep your knowledge and skills that are relevant to your current work up to date. You should be familiar with relevant guidelines and developments that affect your work.
- 7 You must regularly take part in educational activities that maintain and further develop your competence and performance.^{*†}
- 8 You must keep up to date with, and adhere to, the law and other regulation relevant to your work.
- 9 You must take steps to monitor and improve the quality of your work, for example through audit, appraisals and performance reviews. You must respond constructively to the outcomes, undertaking further training where necessary.

Apply knowledge and experience to practice

- 10 You must be competent in your professional roles. You must follow relevant guidance, including GMC guidance, and maintain and develop your knowledge and skills. This applies to all doctors, and to all aspects of a doctor's work, including management,[‡] research or teaching.[§]
- 11 You must recognise and work within the limits of your competence.
- 12 You must make good use of the resources available to you.[‡]
- 13 If you assess, diagnose or treat patients you must provide a good standard of clinical care. Good care will involve:
 - a Adequately assessing the patient's conditions, taking account of their history (including the symptoms, and psychological, spiritual, religious,[¶] social and cultural factors), the patient's views, and, where necessary, examining the patient.
 - b Promptly providing or arranging suitable advice, investigations or treatment where necessary.
 - c Referring^{||} a patient to another practitioner who is accountable to a regulatory body, when this is in the patient's best interests.

* We will be publishing learning materials for doctors in training in late 2012 that you should also read.

† You also need to follow our guidance on continuing professional development – the consultation for this document is ongoing and the guidance will be published in 2012.

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Leadership and management for all doctors* – the consultation is complete and the guidance will be published in 2012.

§ You also need to follow our guidance on *Developing teachers or trainers in undergraduate medical education*.¹

¶ You also need to follow our guidance on *Personal beliefs and medical practice* – this guidance is due for review.²

|| We will be publishing guidance on delegation and referral in late 2012 that you should also read.

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- 14** In providing care you must:
- a** Prescribe drugs or treatment, including repeat prescriptions, only when you have adequate knowledge of the patient's health, and are satisfied that the drugs or treatment serve the patient's needs.*
 - b** Provide effective treatments based on the best available evidence.
 - c** Take all possible steps to alleviate pain and distress whether or not a cure may be possible.†
 - d** Consult and take advice from colleagues when appropriate.
 - e** Respect the patient's right to seek a second opinion.
 - f** Wherever possible, avoid providing medical care to yourself or anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship.
- 15** You must be satisfied that you have consent or other valid authority before you undertake any examination or investigation, provide treatment or involve patients in teaching or research.‡

Ensure that all documentation (including clinical records) formally recording your work is clear, accurate and legible

- 16** You must record your work clearly, accurately and legibly at the same time as the events you are recording or as soon as possible afterwards.
- 17** Records that contain personal data about patients, colleagues or others must be kept securely, and in accordance with any data protection requirements.§
- 18** Clinical records should include relevant clinical findings, the decisions made, the information given to patients and any drugs prescribed or other investigation or treatment.

* You also need to follow our guidance on prescribing³ and we will be publishing updated guidance *Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices* at the end of 2011.

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Treatment and care towards the end of life*.⁴

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together*.⁵

§ You also need to follow our guidance on *Confidentiality*.⁶

Domain 2: Safety and quality

Contribute to and comply with systems to protect patients

- 19** You must take part in systems of quality assurance and quality improvement to promote patient safety by:
- a** participating in regular reviews and audit of the standards and performance of your work and that of your team, taking steps to remedy any deficiencies
 - b** regularly reflecting on the standards of practice and care you provide.
- 20** You must help to reduce risk to patients by:
- a** making sure that the care you provide is compatible with all other aspects of your patient's care
 - b** making sure that you or another named person retains responsibility for the continuity of care for each of your patients and is aware (with that patient's consent) of the treatment or care you provide for that patient^{*}
 - c** providing information[†] to enable health and social care of your patients to be provided safely when their care is transferred to others
 - d** making sure that all staff for whom you are responsible, including locums and students, are properly supervised[‡]
 - e** taking prompt action when problems with basic care for patients who are unable to drink, feed or clean themselves, may lead to patient safety, dignity or comfort being compromised
 - f** providing information for confidential inquiries and significant event recognition and reporting, to help reduce risk to patients
 - g** reporting suspected adverse drug reactions
 - h** cooperating with requests for information from organisations monitoring public health, while following the guidance in *Confidentiality*[†]
 - i** helping to resolve uncertainties about the effects of treatments by supporting research, for example through your own involvement, or encouraging patients to participate
 - j** protecting the interests of patients and volunteers who participate in research.[§]

^{*} We will be publishing guidance on *Working with colleagues* in late 2012 that you should also read.

[†] You also need to follow our guidance on *Confidentiality*.⁶

[‡] You also need to follow our guidance on *Leadership and management for all doctors* – the consultation is complete and the guidance will be published in 2012.

[§] You also need to follow our guidance on *Good practice in research* and *Consent to research*.⁷

Respond to risks to safety

- 21** You must take prompt action* if you think that patient safety is or may be seriously compromised by inadequate premises, equipment or other resources, policies or systems.
- a** You should put the matter right, if that is possible.
 - b** You should draw the matter to the attention of your employing or contracting body. If they do not take adequate action, you should take independent advice on how to take the matter further.
 - c** You must record your concerns and the steps you have taken to try to resolve them.
- 22** You must protect patients from risk of harm posed by another colleague's conduct, performance or health.† If you have concerns* that a colleague may not be fit to practise and may be putting patients at risk you must promptly:
- a** discuss your concerns with a colleague (if possible one who does not work closely with the colleague you have concerns about) or contact your defence body, a professional organisation, or the GMC for advice
 - b** explain your concerns to your employer or contracting body and follow their procedures
 - c** inform the regulatory body if the problem is not resolved by local procedures and patients are still being put at risk.
- 23** You must offer assistance in emergency situations, taking account of your own safety, your competence and the availability of other options for care.
- 24** You should consider the needs and welfare of vulnerable adults and children and young people:‡
- a** when you see patients who are parents or carers
 - b** when you see patients who may be a danger to vulnerable people.
- 25** You must offer assistance to vulnerable adults, children or young people,‡ if you think that their rights have been abused or denied.

* You also need to follow our guidance on raising concerns⁸ and we will be publishing updated guidance *Raising and acting on concerns about patient safety* at the end of 2012.

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Disclosing information about serious communicable diseases*.⁹

‡ We will be publishing guidance on child protection in 2012 that you should also read, you also need to follow our guidance *0-18: guidance for all doctors*.⁹

Protect patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your health

- 26** If you know or suspect that you have a serious condition that you could pass onto patients, or if your judgement or performance could be affected by a condition or its treatment, you must consult a suitably qualified colleague. You must comply with their advice about changes to your practice that they consider necessary. You must not rely on your own assessment of the risk to patients.
- 27** You should be immunised against common serious communicable diseases (unless otherwise contraindicated).
- 28** You should be registered with a general practitioner outside your family.

Domain 3: Communication, partnership and teamwork

Communicate effectively

- 29** You must listen to patients, take account of their views and respond honestly to their questions.
- 30** You must be polite and considerate.
- 31** You must give patients the information they want or need to know in a way they can understand.*
- 32** You must share information with patients about their condition, its likely progression and the options for treatment, including associated risks and uncertainties. If the patient does not wish to know this information, you should follow the advice in *Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together*.¹⁰
- 33** You must make sure patients have all the information they want or need before seeking their consent to provide care or involve them in teaching or research.†
- 34** You must make sure that patients are informed about the progress of their care, and that their decisions are regularly reviewed to ensure that consent is still valid and based on up to date information.*
- 35** You should make sure that arrangements are made to meet patients' language and communication needs wherever possible.*
- 36** You must make sure that patients understand your role and responsibilities in the team, who is responsible for each aspect of patient care, and how information is shared within teams and among those who will be providing their care.
- 37** You must be considerate to those close to the patient, and be sensitive and responsive in providing them with information and support while following the guidance in *Confidentiality*.⁶
- 38** You must share all relevant information clearly and promptly with colleagues involved in your patients' care, including when making a referral. You should seek the patient's consent, where necessary.‡
- 39** You must be readily accessible to patients and colleagues when you are on duty.

* You also need to follow our guidance on *Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together*.¹⁰

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Good practice in research* and *Consent to research*,⁷ and on *Disclosing information for education and training purposes*.¹¹

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Confidentiality*.⁶

Work constructively with colleagues and delegate* effectively

- 40 You must work collaboratively with colleagues[†] to improve care, or maintain good care for patients, and ensure continuity of care wherever possible.
- 41 You must treat colleagues fairly and with respect. This covers all situations and all forms[‡] of interaction and communication.
- 42 You must respect the skills and contributions of your colleagues.[§]
- 43 You must support colleagues who have problems with their performance or health.[§] But you must put patient safety first at all times.[¶]
- 44 When you delegate the care of a patient to a colleague, you must make sure that they have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to provide care for the patient.*
- 45 You should seek out a mentor during your first years working as a doctor and whenever your role changes significantly throughout your career.[§]
- 46 You should be prepared to act as a mentor to less experienced colleagues and to contribute to teaching and training doctors and students.[§]
- 47 You must be aware of the impact of your conduct on other members of the team, and more widely.

* We will be publishing guidance on delegation and referral in 2012 that you should also read.

† We will be publishing guidance on working with colleagues in 2012 that you should also read.

‡ We will be publishing guidance on doctors' use of social networking in 2012 that you should also read.

§ You also need to follow our guidance on *Leadership and management for all doctors* – the consultation is complete and the guidance will be published in 2012.

¶ You also need to follow our guidance on raising concerns⁸ and we will be publishing updated guidance *Raising and acting on concerns about patient safety* at the end of 2012.

Establish and maintain partnerships with patients

- 48** You must treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity and privacy.
- 49** You must treat patients fairly and with respect whatever their life choices and beliefs.*
- 50** You must treat information about patients as confidential,† including after a patient has died.
- 51** You must support patients in caring for themselves to empower them to improve and maintain their health. This may include encouraging patients, including those with long-term conditions, to stay in or return to employment or other purposeful activity. You may also advise patients on the effects of their life choices on their health and well-being and the possible outcomes of their treatments.
- 52** You must explain to patients if you have a conscientious objection to a particular procedure while following the guidance in paragraph 54. You must tell them of their right to see another doctor and make sure they have enough information to exercise that right. If it is not practical for a patient to arrange to see another doctor, you must ensure that arrangements are made for another suitably qualified colleague to take over your role.

* You also need to follow our guidance on *Personal beliefs and medical practice*.¹²

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Confidentiality*.⁶

Domain 4:

Maintaining trust

Show respect for patients

- 53** You must not use your professional position to pursue a sexual or improper emotional relationship with a patient or someone close to them.*
- 54** You must not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious and moral beliefs) to patients in ways that exploit their vulnerability or that are likely to cause them distress.†
- 55** You must be open and honest with patients if things go wrong. If a patient under your care has suffered harm or distress, you must:
- a** put matters right (if that is possible)
 - b** offer an apology
 - c** explain fully and promptly what has happened and the likely short-term and long-term effects.
- 56** You must give your registered name and GMC reference number to anyone who asks for them.

Treat patients and colleagues fairly and without discrimination

- 57** You must give priority to the investigation and treatment of patients on the basis of clinical need.
- 58** The investigations or treatment you provide or arrange must be based on the assessment you and the patient make of their needs and priorities‡ and on your clinical judgement about the likely effectiveness of the treatment options. You must not refuse or delay treatment because you believe that a patient's actions or lifestyle have contributed to their condition.
- 59** You must not refuse to treat a patient because their medical condition may put you at risk: if a patient poses a risk to your health or safety, you should take all available steps to minimise the risk before providing treatment or making suitable alternative arrangements for treatment.
- 60** You must not unfairly discriminate against patients or colleagues by allowing your personal views§ to affect your professional relationships or the treatment you provide or arrange. You should challenge colleagues if their behaviour does not comply with this guidance, and follow the guidance in paragraph 22 if the behaviour amounts to abuse or denial of a patient or colleague's rights.

* You also need to follow our guidance on *Maintaining boundaries*.¹³

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Personal beliefs and medical practice*.¹²

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together*.¹⁰

§ This includes your views about a patient or colleague's age, culture, disability, ethnic or national origin, gender, lifestyle, marital or parental status, race, religion or beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, or social or economic status.

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- 61** You must consider and respond to the needs of patients with disabilities and should make reasonable adjustments to your practice to allow them to receive care to meet their needs.*
 - 62** You must respond promptly and fully to complaints and offer an apology when appropriate.
 - 63** You must not allow a patient's complaint adversely to affect the care or treatment you provide or arrange for them.
 - 64** You must not end a relationship with a patient solely because of a complaint they have made.†
 - 65** You must not end a relationship with a patient because of the resource implications of their care.†
 - 66** You must make sure you have adequate insurance or indemnity cover so that your patients will not be disadvantaged if they make a claim about the clinical care provided by you in the UK.

Act with honesty and integrity

Honesty

- 67** You must be honest and trustworthy in your professional practice.
- 68** You must make sure that your conduct at all times justifies your patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the profession.
- 69** You must always be honest about your experience, qualifications and current role.
- 70** You must act with honesty and integrity when involved in research, following national research governance guidelines and GMC guidance.‡

Communicating information

- 71** When communicating publicly, including advertising your services, speaking or writing in the media:§
 - a** you must ensure that the information that you publish about your medical services is factual and verifiable, and does not exploit patients' vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge
 - b** you must maintain patient confidentiality

* You also need to follow our guidance on *Leadership and management for all doctors* – the consultation is complete and the guidance will be published in 2012.

† We will be publishing guidance on ending relationships with patients in late 2012 that you should also read.

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Good practice in research* and *Consent to research*.⁷

§ You also need to follow our guidance on *Responding to criticism in the press*.¹³

- c you should remember when using social networking* sites that communications intended for friends or family may become more widely available.
- 72** You must be honest and trustworthy when writing reports,† giving evidence‡ to courts or tribunals and when completing or signing forms, reports, and other documents. You must make sure that any evidence you give or documents you write or sign are not false or misleading.
- a You must take reasonable steps to verify the information.
 - b You must not deliberately leave out relevant information.
- 73** You must be honest and trustworthy in all your communication with patients and colleagues.
- a You must give all the relevant information they require, making sure it is what you believe to be accurate.
 - b You must make clear the limits of your knowledge.
 - c You must not give false or misleading information.

- 74** You must be honest and objective when appraising or assessing the performance of colleagues, including locums and students, and when providing references,§ including all information relevant to competence, performance and conduct.¶
- 75** You must make clear the limits of your competence and knowledge if giving evidence or acting as a witness.‡

Openness and legal or disciplinary proceedings

- 76** You must cooperate with formal enquiries and complaints procedures and must disclose all relevant information while following the guidance in *Confidentiality*.||
- 77** You must inform the GMC without delay** if, anywhere in the world:
- a you have accepted a caution from the police or been criticised by an official enquiry or by a Coroner or Sheriff
 - b you have been charged with or found guilty of a criminal offence
 - c another professional body has made a finding against your registration as a result of fitness to practise procedures.

* We will be publishing guidance on doctors' use of social networking in 2012 that you should also read.

† You also need to follow our guidance on *Disclosing information for insurance, employment and similar purposes*.¹⁴

‡ You also need to follow our guidance on *Acting as an expert witness*.¹⁵

§ You also need to follow our guidance on *Writing references*,¹⁶ an updated version of which will be published in 2012.

¶ You also need to follow our guidance on *Leadership and management for all doctors* – the consultation is complete and the guidance will be published in 2012.

|| You also need to follow our guidance on *Confidentiality*.⁶

** You also need to follow our guidance on *Reporting convictions*.¹⁶

78 If you are suspended by an organisation from a medical post, or have restrictions placed on your practice you must, without delay, inform any other organisations for which you undertake medical work and any patients you see independently.

Honesty in financial dealings*

79 You must be honest in financial and commercial dealings with patients, employers, insurers and other organisations or individuals, declaring any interest that you have.

80 You must not allow any interests* you have to affect the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients.

81 If you are faced with a conflict of interests,* you should be open about the conflict, declaring your interest formally, and you should be prepared to exclude yourself from decision making.

82 You must not ask for or accept – from patients, colleagues or others – any inducement, gift or hospitality which may affect or be seen to affect the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients. You must not offer such inducements.

83 You must act in your patients' best interests when making referrals and when providing or arranging treatment or care.

* We will be publishing guidance on financial and commercial interests in 2012 that you should also read which will include guidance in GMP 2006 and guidance on *Conflicts of interest*.¹⁷

References

- 1 General Medical Council (2009) *Developing teachers or trainers in undergraduate medical education* www.gmc-uk.org/Developing_teachers_web.pdf_40939758.pdf
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- 16 General Medical Council (2007) *Writing references* www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/writing_references.asp
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- 18 General Medical Council (2008) *Conflicts of interests* www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/conflicts_of_interest.asp

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**General
Medical
Council**

Regulating doctors
Ensuring good medical practice