Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Code of Professional Conduct for Medical Students at Monash University
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Introduction

As a medical student you are now considered a doctor in-training by the Faculty. As such you will have privileged access to people and their health information. With this access comes responsibilities and expectations. Understanding and accepting these from the very beginning of medical training will help you establish an ethical approach to medical practice. It will help lay the foundations for a trusting doctor-patient relationship in your later student years, and in your subsequent career. Any breach of these expectations could result in serious repercussions, for you, your continuing medical education and your later career.

Although your initial involvement with patients will be small, this will increase substantially as you progress through the course, so it is important that you start implementing these professional behaviour expectations from the beginning. From this day onward you represent your medical school and the medical profession. As such your behaviour outside the clinical environment, including your personal life, may have an impact on your fitness to practice. Your behaviour should justify the trust the public places in the medical profession.

This code has been adapted from the University of Otago’s Code of Professional Conduct for Medical Students 2010. It has been contextualised for the Monash University and Australian setting. It highlights ten core professional value statements grouped into four domains of professional practice.

Please read through this code carefully as you will be expected to be conversant with the expectations and obligations it outlines during all components of your medical training.

Notes:

1. The term ‘will’ is used to indicate that the associated statement sets a minimum standard that is expected of all medical students. The term ‘should’ is more aspirational and reflects a standard that the Medical School aims to promote and nurture, and students should aim to meet.

2. This code operates in conjunction with current Acts, Regulations and Codes of Practice that you will need to become familiar with during your training. These include Good Medical Practice: A code of conduct for Australian Doctors (Australian Medical council, 2004), Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Vic) Act 2009, Health Records Act 2001, AMA Code of Ethics 2004.

3. These standards apply to all electronic communications or ‘virtual’ patient interactions. Special care may be needed to ensure patient confidentiality is respected, especially on social networking sites.
A. Interactions with patients and their families

1. Respecting patients and their families

As a medical student I will:

1.1 Respect the dignity, privacy and bodily integrity of patients.

1.2 Understand my own values and beliefs and manage their possible influence on my interactions with patients.

1.3 Not impose my own cultural values, beliefs and practices on patients or discriminate against any person on the basis (for example) of age, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, creed, political affiliation, economic, social or health status.

1.4 Respect the autonomy of patients.

1.5 Treat patients and their families politely and considerately.

1.6 Ensure my appearance and dress are appropriate to enable effective and respectful interaction with patients and families.

1.7 Respect the needs and values of patients and their family members.
2. Not exploiting patients or their families

As a medical student I will:

2.1 Not exploit any patient, whether physically, sexually, emotionally, or financially. Any sexual interaction with a patient is unacceptable.

2.2 Not abuse the generosity of patients in my pursuit of learning but place concerns for their wellbeing above all else.

2.3 Acknowledge the generosity of patients and be aware of the possible tensions between their wellbeing and my own learning.

3. Obtaining informed consent for your interaction with patients

Your clinical supervisor is responsible for obtaining consent for your interaction with patients. However, you should not assume this has been obtained so always seek patients’ permission before an interaction.

As a medical student I will:

3.1 Always request patients’ consent to interact with them and ensure that consent is given freely and without coercion.

3.2 Acknowledge and accept that patients may refuse, or withdraw consent, to interact with me at any stage.

3.3 Always be guided in my actions by ethical and legal standards of behaviour.

3.4 Seek the guidance of my clinical supervisor where patients are unable to consent, for example in the case of a child.

3.5 Make a special effort to assist the patient to reach the necessary level of understanding, for example where the patient is a child, or when language, illness or other factors interfere.

3.6 Ensure the patient understands the student’s involvement in the interaction is for educational purposes.

3.7 Ask patients if they have any questions in relation to giving consent and if I am unable to answer them refer the questions to my clinical supervisor/tutor.

4. Appreciating the limits of my role

As a medical student I will:

4.1 Acknowledge the level of my skills, experience and knowledge, and not represent myself as more competent or qualified than I am, and correct any such misunderstandings that arise.

4.2 Not give advice or provide information to patients, family members or the general public, which is beyond my level of knowledge and expertise. When asked for such comment, I will direct that person to an appropriate professional.

4.3 Not initiate any form of treatment, except in an emergency where no-one more able or qualified is available to provide timely intervention, and recognising the limits of my own knowledge and skills.

4.4 When otherwise approached for assistance, recommend that people seek appropriate professional help.
B. Personal and Professional Values

5. Maintaining patient confidentiality

Patient information is confidential. Disclosure in any form, without patient’s permission or other legally acceptable justification is a breach of a core ethical principle of medical practice, betrays the trust patients need to have in the medical profession and has the potential to cause harm.

Patient information may be discussed for educational purposes with health professional staff who are directly involved in the care of that patient and on occasion with colleagues in a setting where confidentiality is protected.

As a medical student I will:

5.1 Hold all patient information in confidence, including after patients have ended treatment or died.
5.2 Respect patients’ right to determine who should be provided with their personal information.
5.3 Not remove or copy patient-related material without specific permission and handle such material in accordance with 5.4.
5.4 Ensure that all my documents and images containing patient information are de-identified, kept in a secure place in a way that prevents unauthorised access, and securely destroyed when no longer required.
5.5 Be aware of the limited circumstances in which breaches of confidentiality may be justified or required.
5.6 Not access patient information unless I am involved in their care or have a legitimate reason and permission from those authorised to give such permission.

6. Researching ethically

As a medical student undertaking or associated with research activities I will:

6.1 Adhere to all the ethical principles in the appropriate national guidelines and seek ethical approval from the appropriate research ethics committee.

7. Maintaining personal wellbeing

As a medical student I will:

7.1 Acknowledge that my physical and mental health impacts on my ability to function in my role with patients and staff. In the event of illness or impairment that interferes with this role, I will seek appropriate assistance.
7.2 Maintain my own wellbeing to the level that ensures I can carry out my role.
7.3 Remain aware of the wellbeing of my colleagues and support them to the extent that I am able, to seek help when needed.
7.4 Seek support and/or assistance from an appropriate staff member if I experience feelings of exploitation, victimisation or generalised distress that prevents me studying effectively or fulfilling my clinical responsibilities.
C. Relationships with Staff and Colleagues

8. Respecting staff and colleagues

As a medical student I will:

8.1 Show respect to doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and all other members of the health care team.

8.2 Show respect to teaching and non-teaching staff.

8.3 Show respect to simulated patients, volunteers and peers.

8.4 Not exploit my peers, or others, in a vulnerable or more junior position to myself.

8.5 Hold in confidence information about my peers gathered in learning situations, but recognise that there are limited circumstances in which breaches of confidentiality to appropriate persons may be justified.

8.6 Ensure invasive procedures are not practiced on colleagues under any circumstances.
D. Commitment to professional standards and continuing improvement in self and others

9. Holding a positive attitude to learning

As a medical student I will:

9.1 Commit to continued learning and the development of skills.

9.2 Recognise that my learning needs are valid and important.

9.3 Be prepared to seek and respond to constructive feedback on my own performance.

9.4 Where barriers exist for learning opportunities, identify these and notify my academic supervisor.

9.5 Act with integrity in all learning and assessment situations.

9.6 Not plagiarise another’s work or research and will abide by the plagiarism and dishonest practice policies of my university.

9.7 Show respect in working with human cadavers and human tissue. (See the Code of Conduct issued by the Anatomy Department at the relevant University.)

As a medical student I should:

9.8 Care for my peers, provide support in learning opportunities, and work collaboratively and respectfully in all situations.

9.9 Be prepared, when called upon, to provide constructive feedback to my peers on their performance.

9.10 Make the most of educational and clinical opportunities to extend my knowledge and further my skills with appropriate support and supervision.

10. Accepting wider professional responsibilities

Doctors have a responsibility to the profession and to the public to maintain high standards of care; this wider responsibility is over and above individual responsibility for their own clinical competence.

As a medical student, I will:

10.1 Report matters of serious concern in a professional manner, including those which may impact on immediate patient safety, to those with the authority to act.

10.2 Not use social networking sites or public forums to raise concerns about an individual.

10.3 Not exploit my role as a student doctor for personal gain.

10.4 Give judicious, constructive evaluation and feedback as appropriate on medical education programs.

10.5 Be aware that alcohol and substance misuse may impact on health and fitness to practice and may cross the boundaries of legality, which becomes a professional conduct issue.