

FIP STATEMENT OF POLICY AND CALL TO ACTION

Guidance for developing a Code of Ethics for pharmacists

Executive summary

This Statement of Policy provides guidance for FIP members, FIP member organisations and relevant national stakeholders, including regulators, professional bodies and education providers, in developing, updating and implementing codes of ethics for pharmacists. It recognises that pharmacists practise across increasingly diverse settings and roles, and that ethical guidance must always apply to pharmacists in all areas of practice.

The statement sets out the purpose of codes of ethics as public-facing expressions of the profession's core values, responsibilities and standards of conduct. It highlights the importance of ethical decision-making, professional autonomy, integrity, accountability, confidentiality, respect for human rights, non-discrimination, patient-centred and person-centred care, interprofessional collaboration, and the responsible use of new technologies. It also recognises emerging ethical priorities, including pharmacist well-being, protection from undue pressure, conscientious objection, artificial intelligence, and environmental sustainability.

Introduction

To support FIP members, FIP member organisations and relevant national stakeholders, including regulators, professional bodies and education providers in developing, updating and implementing their own code of ethics by setting universal principles and providing guidance.

About code of ethics:

A code of ethics is a public-facing articulation of a profession's core principles and values.¹ A code of ethics for pharmacists sets out the principles of conduct and behaviour expected of pharmacists to uphold quality in health care and achieve the best service to society. By providing an ethical framework, a code of ethics promotes dignity, safety, and quality in care, including values and standards that may go beyond what is explicitly required by law.² These principles guide professional judgement and reflect what pharmacists stand for. Depending on the jurisdiction, a code of ethics may be enforceable or serve primarily as a normative and guiding reference.

About professional ethics:

A profession is distinguished by the willingness of individual practitioners to comply with ethical and professional standards that exceed minimum legal requirements.³

The role of the pharmacist in society is continuing to expand. Today, pharmacy extends far beyond direct clinical care. Pharmacists contribute to research, education and training, policy development and management, regulation, auditing, pharmaceutical innovation and manufacturing, supply chain optimisation, and a wide range of administrative and leadership functions. These diverse responsibilities strengthen both direct and indirect patient-centred care, demonstrating the profession's growing impact

on health systems and communities. Accordingly, a code of ethics applies to pharmacists in all settings and at all times.

At all times, pharmacists should strive to provide the best possible care for patients¹ and carers,² and facilitate equitable access to available medicines, health technologies and pharmaceutical care services both directly and indirectly.

Purpose of codes of professional ethics:

A code of professional ethics supports pharmacists in reflecting on their own actions and ensuring that decision-making in practice aligns with what the profession collectively considers important, even when not explicitly stated in law. A code of professional ethics also provides pharmacists with an extrinsic reference when responding to external expectations or requests that conflict with professional standards. It aligns pharmacy with the broader healthcare community, where professional codes help maintain consistent, responsible, and value-driven behaviour.⁴

It is intended to reaffirm and state publicly the obligations that form the basis of the ethical roles and responsibilities of pharmacists.⁵ These obligations are based on established ethical principles. It should also guide individual pharmacists in their daily practice of the profession, reflecting this profession's commitment to contributing to the health and quality of life of patients, animals and the environment, and its dedication to serving society.⁶

Pharmacists' professional associations shall assume responsibility for the promotion, development and dissemination of an up-to-date code of ethics setting out their professional obligations and taking steps to assure that pharmacists comply with the provisions of that code.

In every country, institutions offering pharmaceutical education and continuing professional development should include a code of ethics, and its underlying principles of respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice human rights and professional reputation³ in their offerings for all students and professionals.⁷⁻⁸

It is recognised that in some settings or jurisdictions, such codes of ethics form the basis for the disciplinary powers of regulators or statutory bodies.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, FIP CALLS FOR THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

Professional pharmacy organisations:

1. Support the regulation of the practice of the profession by the relevant body in each country, whether an independent regulator or a professional body with regulatory functions, and ensure respect for the rights of patients.
2. Assume responsibility for the promotion, development and dissemination of a code of ethics, and undertake to support compliance with the provisions contained therein.
3. Promote and facilitate access to continuing education for pharmacists on ethics.
4. Integrate the code of ethics within policy documents, practice guidance, practice support tools, and quality management programmes, where applicable.

¹For the purpose of the document, the term 'patients' is used as an encompassing term for all users of the services provided by pharmacists.

²The terms "carers" and "caregivers" are considered to be synonymous.

³ The term "dignity" is used in some jurisdictions.

5. Collaborate with academic and educational authorities to promote ethical approaches in teaching and education, emphasising the importance of ethics education, responsibility, and professional conduct, and
6. Undertake periodic reviews and updates of a code of ethics as appropriate.

The obligations of pharmacists formalised in codes of ethics should include:

Ethical conduct and integrity

7. Act with honesty, integrity, and professionalism in all relationships with patients, carers, colleagues, other health professionals, and society, and to avoid any conduct that may undermine public trust or bring the profession into disrepute.
8. Practise in accordance with contemporary evidence, guidelines, regulations, laws and recognised professional standards, including FIP standards.
9. Identify, acknowledge, declare and appropriately manage conflicts of interest.
10. Exercise independent, unbiased professional judgement in all decision-making, supporting patient-centred care.
11. Uphold accountability across an expanded pharmacists' scope of practice, encompassing both clinical and social responsibilities.
12. Ensure awareness of research ethics and ethical decision-making (e.g. medicine dispensing) to support sound professional judgement and the ability to assess the reliability of scientific literature, and
13. Uphold duty of care responsibilities and meet ethical and professional obligations during disasters, epidemics, pandemics, and other public health emergencies.

Professional accountability and autonomy

14. Promote and uphold the professional autonomy necessary for pharmacists to fulfil their role, recognising that autonomy is both a right and an ethical obligation to apply independent judgement, including the moral courage to resist pressures that may compromise care.
15. Carry out professional activities with full technical and scientific autonomy within the limits of law and ethical principles.
16. Ensure that professional judgement is not influenced by inappropriate financial, commercial, institutional, or personal incentives and other conflicts of interest, and
17. Exercise the right and duty to refuse participation in practices or decisions that are scientifically unsound, unsafe, unethical, or contrary to professional standards, supported by legal protections and organisational ethics frameworks.

Pharmacist well-being and safe working conditions

18. Recognise that professional competence, ethical judgement, and patient safety depend on pharmacists' physical and mental well-being and safe working environments and practices.
19. Support well-being through confidential support pathways, non-punitive rehabilitative approaches, and systems that promote mental health and resilience for oneself and colleagues.
20. Protect pharmacists from coercion, retaliation or undue pressure by owners, managers, employers, or other parties to act in ways that are unethical, unsafe, or contrary to professional standards, and
21. Avoid moral distress by recognising, supporting or providing opportunity for conscientious objection.

Maintaining relationship with the patient

22. Respect for human rights and the principle of non-discrimination.
23. Respect patients' rights, dignity and cultural, moral, and religious values.
24. Promote equality and non-discrimination regardless of background and set clear expectations for appropriate professional behaviour.
25. Consider the limitations of available resources and uphold the principles of equity and justice, and
26. Emphasise ethical communication, shared decision-making, and compassion as components of ethical care.

Privacy protection

27. Establish and maintain clear professional boundaries, including expectations regarding conflicts of interest, social interactions (including on social media), and the physical examination of patients.
28. Keep professional confidentiality.⁴
29. Respect and protect the confidentiality of patient data and information acquired or accessed in the course of providing professional services, including those delivered remotely, electronically, or through media and internet-based platforms, and
30. Ensure that patient information is disclosed only with informed consent, strictly necessary for the proper performance of professional activity, and as permitted by applicable legislation and regulation (including digital information).

Right to refuse

31. Ensure that individuals who exercise conscientious objection based on deeply held moral or ethical convictions do so transparently. Where conscientious objection is invoked, establish conditions that protect patient access, continuity of care, and non-discrimination (to the extent and within the limits permitted by the applicable legislation to ensure timely patient access).
32. Acknowledge that when personal values conflict with professional judgement, ethical tensions may arise between autonomy and beneficence, and to ensure pharmacists are educated to recognise, reflect on, and appropriately address these challenges in practice, and
33. Ensure continuity of care for patients in situations where ethical beliefs create conflict, upholding respect for patient autonomy.

Interprofessional collaboration

34. Promote interprofessional collaboration and mutual respect among health professionals.
35. Clarify shared responsibilities for patient safety, continuity of care, and quality improvement, and
36. Proactively share scientific knowledge and technical skills with other healthcare professionals, for the benefit of the patient.

Between the pharmacist and society

37. Contribute to public health and quality of life through health education and literacy, healthy lifestyle promotion, and participation in public health programmes, including surveillance, early detection, and coordinated action with health authorities.
38. Demonstrate professional leadership and advocacy in addressing health inequities and barriers to access to medicines, pharmaceutical services, and

⁴ Personal information that pharmacists become aware of in the course of their professional duty is subject to professional secrecy. Professional secrecy is binding on all pharmacists in all their actions, regardless of their mode of practice.

reliable health information, with particular attention to vulnerable populations.

39. Ensure the integrity, security, and ethical management of the medicines supply chain in the provision of pharmaceutical products and services, and
40. Contribute to the efficient and responsible use of human, technological, therapeutic, and economic resources.

Within the professional pharmaceutical organisation

41. Take primary responsibility, where applicable, for regulating the practice of the profession, safeguarding professional ethics and dignity, and ensuring due respect for the rights of patients and users of services provided by pharmacists.
42. Promote, develop, and disseminate a code of pharmaceutical ethics, and ensure compliance with its provisions through appropriate professional and organisational mechanisms.
43. Promote and facilitate access to continuing education for pharmacists, supporting lifelong learning and the continuous enhancement of professional competence.
44. Collaborate with academic authorities to promote the quality of pharmacy education, emphasising the importance of teaching ethics, professionalism, and responsible conduct, and
45. Undertake periodic review of a code and update it when appropriate, ensuring that ethical guidance remains relevant, responsive to scientific and societal developments, and aligned with contemporary professional practice.

Maintaining high quality patient-centred services

46. Maintain professional competence through continuing professional development (CPD), by assessing learning needs, planning and undertaking structured learning, and recording and evaluating improvements in practice, consistent with the FIP CPD approach. Professional bodies, employers and regulators should support competence through access to quality-assured CPD, appropriate learning time where feasible, and mechanisms to recognise and verify CPD.
47. Recognise that ongoing training and the continuous updating of professional knowledge are an ethical duty, a right, and an essential responsibility throughout one's professional life in order to respond to evolving scientific developments, societal norms and healthcare needs.
48. Maintain strong communication and consultation skills that foster clarity, trust, and shared decision-making with patients, carers, and colleagues, and
49. Demonstrate empathy and compassion in patient care, recognising the human-to-human relationship and the emotional dimensions of health and well-being.

Use of new technologies applied to professional practice

50. Consider emerging areas of practice, such as pharmacogenomics and artificial intelligence (AI) in clinical decision-making, recognising both their potential and their ethical implications.
51. Promote the ethical and responsible use of digital health, telepharmacy, and AI technologies, to the extent and within the limits permitted by the applicable legislation, by safeguarding patient safety, confidentiality, and professional judgement, and by following organisational data governance and ethical AI policies, or, where these are not yet established, adopting guidance from international frameworks such as those provided by the World Health Organization or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and

52. Uphold professional standards consistently across all digital and remote modes of practice, ensuring that professionalism is maintained in media, online interactions, and technologically supported care.

Environment and sustainability

53. Commit to integrating sustainability principles into pharmacy practice by promoting the responsible use of medicines, reducing avoidable waste, supporting safe disposal, considering environmental impacts where appropriate, and contributing to socially and environmentally sustainable health systems without compromising patient care.

Governments and policymakers and patient and patient organisations:

1. Raise awareness of core values and ethical principles, particularly as the scope of practice continues to expand.
2. Engage and consult key stakeholders while acting as advocates for the profession.
3. Contribute to the development of a code of ethics by providing informed input and ensuring it reflects patient-centred values, autonomy, and equitable access to pharmacy care.
4. Support accountability and continuous improvement of a code of ethics by participating in feedback and review processes informed by patient and caregiver experiences, and
5. Promote collaborative ethical practice by engaging constructively with pharmacists to build trust, shared understanding, and respectful partnerships.

Pharmacy academic institutions and education providers:

1. Embed ethics teaching in the curriculum to ensure that ethical reasoning and professional values are embedded in all stages of pharmacy education.
2. Prepare students for today's challenges, including digital practice, privacy and cybersecurity, and the ethical use of AI, equipping future pharmacists to navigate emerging technologies responsibly.
3. Ensure educators are well-equipped and that the learning environment models professional behaviour, fosters integrity, and supports student well-being, and
4. Assess learning needs and plan, implement, and evaluate improvements in professional practice, supporting a culture of continuous learning and ethical development.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, FIP RECOMMENDS THAT AND CALLS FOR ACTION BY STAKEHOLDERS TO:

1. Issue and once published, regularly update the FIP Code of Ethics to reflect new developments, such as major health policy changes, patient safety issues and technological shifts, to ensure a Code of Ethics' currency and current global best practice. Updates should involve stakeholder consultation, including pharmacists, educators, and regulators.
2. Advocate for the development and regular updates of stakeholders' and members' codes of ethics or encourage adoption of the latest FIP Code of Ethics. Engage key stakeholder representation in the development and update of a code of ethics, ensuring diversity of perspectives and cultural inclusivity.
3. Collect information on the involvement of pharmacists and pharmacy organisations in ethics committees.
4. Facilitate congress sessions and digital events that promote ethical awareness and professional conduct.
5. Create and maintain a pharmacists' codes of ethics from various countries, educational materials, and other relevant resources, and
6. Include pharmacy organisations' ethics-related activities in FIP's data and intelligence collection.

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