



SINGAPORE PHARMACY COUNCIL

CODE OF ETHICS

MAY 2015

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PREAMBLE

1. Introduction

The first version of the Pharmacists' Code of Ethics was established in 1980 by the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore (PSS). It comprised 12 principles of ethical practice that a pharmacist must comply with in the profession. This Code of Ethics was subsequently accepted by the former Singapore Pharmacy Board (SPB) as a basis of professional practice and conduct in 1981. Since then, the pharmacist's role has progressed beyond its traditional role of dispensing and supplying of medications. Hence a revision of this Code is necessary and timely to reflect the expansion of the pharmacist's role within the healthcare system, namely, the community pharmacies and hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, academia as well as research and development.

Pharmacists must abide by the laws governing society and their professional practice. In addition, the profession must be self-regulated in professional and ethical conduct to protect the public, maintain the trust of society and uphold the profession. With this revision of the Code of Ethics, Singapore Pharmacy Council (SPC) aims to promote it as an extension of the Pharmacist's Pledge so as to affirm the professionalism of pharmacists.

2. The Pharmacist's Pledge

The Pharmacist's Pledge is made up of ten statements formulated around the acronym "PHARMACIST". It describes the values, ethics, vision and professionalism to be embraced by all pharmacists.

Pharmacists solemnly pledge to:

Practise my profession with honesty, integrity and compassion;

Honour traditions and embrace advances in my profession;

Abide by the governing laws and Code of Ethics;

Respect and keep in confidence patient information;

Maintain a high standard of professional competence through life long learning;

Always place patient's interests first and treat them equally;

Collaborate with other healthcare colleagues to achieve the desired treatment outcomes;

Impart my knowledge, experience and skills to nurture future pharmacists;

Strive to provide high quality and cost-effective health services and products;

Translate scientific advances into better healthcare."

3. Objectives of the Code of Ethics

The aim of the revised Code of Ethics is to provide a guide for pharmacists on what is regarded as the expected standards from pharmacists in the discharge of their professional duties and responsibilities. As the professional conduct of pharmacists is under the jurisdiction of SPC as governed by the Pharmacists Registration Act 2007 (No. 48 of 2007), SPC is empowered to discipline errant pharmacists who fail to uphold the standards of the Code or when they contravene any part of the Act, Regulations, or other statutes and regulations governing the practice of pharmacy.

The revised Code does not contain detailed guidance, but acts as a core document from which further standards and guidelines can be developed. Specific pharmacists' practices and standards already governed by law which, when breached, will result in prosecution, are not described here in detail. For example, advertising issues which are already covered under the Medicines Act, the Medicines (Medical Advertisement) Regulations and the Medicines (Advertisement and Sales) Act, will not be dealt with by this revised Code of Ethics.

As society is continually changing its expectations and norms, SPC acknowledges that no published guidelines can be either exhaustive or final. This Code of Ethics represents the fundamental tenets of conduct and behaviour expected of pharmacists practising in Singapore. It provides guidance in fostering a professional relationship with patients, other healthcare professionals, colleagues and the society. It also serves as a guide for pharmacists when they encounter ethical challenges and dilemmas in their course of work. Serious disregard or persistent failure to meet the Code of Ethics can potentially cause harm to patients or bring disrepute to the profession. This may lead to disciplinary proceedings for professional misconduct.

4. The Construction of the new Code of Ethics

The revised Code of Ethics for pharmacists is composed of 10 principles which are housed in a framework comprising three main components that are closely interrelated (Figure 1):

- (A) Practices and Responsibilities
- (B) Professional Qualities
- (C) Inter-Professional Relationships

Within each component, the individual principle is elaborated by guidelines to describe the application of the Code.



Figure 1: Framework of the Code of Ethics

5. Expected Outcomes of Adherence to the Code of Ethics

It is important for pharmacists to remember that they have a public commitment to uphold the highest standards of pharmacy practice and ensure the practice of the proper code of conduct for public good. Therefore, with a close adherence to the 10 principles of the Code of Ethics, the following outcomes will be achieved:

1. Respect for every person; this includes respect for autonomy and protection of persons with diminished autonomy.
2. Beneficence for persons in need; this refers to the ethical obligation to maximize benefits and to minimize harm for each person.
3. Justice for all; this refers to the ethical obligation to provide each person in accordance with what is morally right and proper, and to give to each person what is due to him.
4. Collaborative relationship with other healthcare professionals, patients and caregivers to achieve optimal treatment outcomes.
5. Continuing education, training and development of pharmacists to ensure a high standard of professional competency.

This Code of Ethics is meant to be used as a supplement in addition to, and not in derogation of or substitution for, any other written laws.

CODE OF ETHICS

A. Practices & Responsibilities

1. A pharmacist shall make the care of patients as the first consideration.

- 1.1. A pharmacist shall consider and act in the best interest of the individual patient.
- 1.2. A pharmacist shall endeavour to provide professional patient-focused care to optimize health outcomes.
- 1.3. A pharmacist shall seek to ensure safe and timely access to medicines and be satisfied of the clinical appropriateness of medicines supplied to the patient.
- 1.4. A pharmacist shall encourage the effective use of medicines and be satisfied that patients, or those who care for them, know how to use their medicines appropriately.
- 1.5. A pharmacist shall provide professional advice and counselling on medications at every opportunity, and shall only refrain from doing so when deemed to be in the best interest of the patient.
- 1.6. A pharmacist shall not supply to any member of the public any substance, medicinal product or medical appliance which the pharmacist knows, or has reason to believe, is intended to be used in a manner which would be detrimental to health.
- 1.7. A pharmacist shall not encourage a member of the public to purchase or obtain more of a medicinal product than is required.
- 1.8. A pharmacist shall seek consultation with fellow pharmacist(s), and/or with other healthcare professionals, when deemed to be in the best interest of the patient.

2. A pharmacist shall respect and treat all patients equally, and protect their dignity and privacy.

- 2.1. A pharmacist shall treat patients without prejudice of race, religion, creed, social standing, disability or socio-economic status; and not allow personal beliefs to influence the management of patients. Where a pharmacist feels unable to continue to care for a patient due to such beliefs, the patient should be referred to another pharmacist who is able and willing to care for the patient.
- 2.2. A pharmacist shall ensure that confidential information is not disclosed without consent, apart from where permitted to do so by the law or in exceptional circumstances.

- 2.3. A pharmacist shall take all reasonable steps to prevent accidental disclosure or unauthorised access to confidential information.
- 2.4. A pharmacist shall use information obtained in the course of professional practice only for the purposes for which it was given or where otherwise lawful.
- 2.5. A pharmacist shall not discuss the therapeutic efficacy of prescriptions or provide patient counselling in such a manner as to impair confidence in the prescriber or other healthcare professionals.

3. A pharmacist shall comply with legal requirements, professional standards and embrace best practices in the relevant field.

- 3.1. A pharmacist shall keep up-to-date and comply with the laws that govern practice in the course of discharging his professional duties.
- 3.2. A pharmacist shall be familiar with best practice guidelines and aim to achieve the professional pharmacy practice standards endorsed by Singapore Pharmacy Council (SPC).
- 3.3. A pharmacist shall ensure that the premise of practice must fulfil professional practice guidelines and standards so as to enable the provision of safe, high quality and cost effective health services and products.

4. A pharmacist shall strive to achieve and maintain high professional practice standards in the promotion and provision of health services and products.

- 4.1. A pharmacist shall take responsibility for all work done personally and ensure that those under his direct supervision are able to carry out their duties competently.
- 4.2. A pharmacist shall be satisfied that appropriate protocols exist to ensure that the care and safety of the patient is not compromised.
- 4.3. A pharmacist shall refrain from accepting conditions of service which may compromise his professional independence, judgement or integrity.
- 4.4. A pharmacist offering online pharmacy services and/or telepharmacy services shall ensure that online aspect of operations comply with similar good pharmacy practice standards as stipulated in the guidelines for telepharmacy.
- 4.5. A pharmacist shall, when providing information in his professional capacity in the public domain (websites, blogging, public speaking, broadcasting, writing, etc), ensure that the information conforms to the following criteria:

- a. Factual
- b. Accurate
- c. Verifiable
- d. No exaggerated claims
- e. Not misleading
- f. Not sensational
- g. Not persuasive
- h. Not laudatory
- i. Not disparaging

4.6. A pharmacist shall abide by governing laws, standards and guidelines pertaining to the research, manufacture, distribution, sale, promotion and advertising of all health services and products; in addition, the information provided shall comply with the criteria listed in 4.5.

4.6.1. A pharmacist shall not advertise himself in any manner that explicitly suggests his professional skill is of a higher order than those of other pharmacists; or in a manner reflecting adversely on the skill or ability or professional services rendered by other pharmacists.

4.6.2. A pharmacist shall restrict the publication, distribution or exhibition of an advertisement concerning his practice to the standards approved by SPC.

4.6.3. A pharmacist shall not mislead the public by promoting or criticising any health product or services, through advertisements or other endorsements.

5. A pharmacist shall be responsible for personal fitness to practise.

5.1. A pharmacist who is aware that he is suffering from a condition that renders him unfit to practise shall seek appropriate treatment.

5.2. A pharmacist is responsible, if he is of sound mind, to disclose to the SPC if he has been diagnosed with any medical condition that may render him unfit to continue practice.

5.3. A pharmacist who has reasonable grounds to believe that another pharmacist may be putting patients at risk shall inform SPC.

B. Professional Qualities

6. A pharmacist shall act with honesty and integrity, adhere to accepted standards of professional conduct, uphold public trust and confidence, and maintain the reputation of the profession.

- 6.1. A pharmacist shall not engage in behaviour or activity likely to bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession.
- 6.2. A pharmacist shall avoid conflicts of interest or situations which may compromise professional relationships with patients and colleagues or influence the objectivity of professional judgement.

7. A pharmacist shall keep abreast of advancements in pharmaceutical knowledge so as to maintain a high standard of competency in professional practice for the assurance of effective outcomes and safety in patients.

- 7.1. A pharmacist shall embrace continuous professional development as a form of personal responsibility to ensure knowledge and skills are kept up-to-date and relevant to the field of practice.
- 7.2. A pharmacist shall keep up with and be prepared to engage new technology in delivering quality services and products to his patients.
- 7.3. A pharmacist shall be prepared to learn and apply new knowledge and skills to expand his roles and responsibilities in the healthcare system.

8. A pharmacist shall ensure that research activities are conducted in accordance to best practice guidelines that are applicable to the area of research.

- 8.1. A pharmacist shall conduct research activities with integrity and honesty so as to gain the acceptance and respect of the research community and maintain the confidence of the public.
- 8.2. A pharmacist shall ensure that the necessary approvals from the appropriate regulatory authorities for conducting research activities have been obtained.
- 8.3. A pharmacist shall ensure proper safeguards of patient's safety and integrity when conducting research and comply with research ethical guidelines issued by the relevant institutions and organizations.

C. Inter-Professional Relationships

9. A pharmacist shall collaborate with other healthcare professionals, patients and caregivers to achieve optimal treatment outcomes for their patients.

- 9.1. A pharmacist shall explain the treatment plans and available options in a clear manner and take reasonable steps to ensure information shared is easily understood by patients and caregivers so as to empower them to make informed decisions about their own health management.
- 9.2. A pharmacist shall maintain effective professional relationships with his colleagues and other healthcare professionals and offer assistance when called upon for advice.
- 9.3. A pharmacist shall refrain from publicly criticising his colleagues and other healthcare professionals.
- 9.4. A pharmacist must seek clarifications from colleagues and other healthcare professionals if they have reason to believe that such decisions could compromise the safety or care of his patients.

10. A pharmacist shall impart his knowledge, experience and skills to nurture future and new pharmacists.

- 10.1. A pharmacist shall contribute to the education, training and professional development of future pharmacists through sharing of relevant knowledge, skills and expertise.
- 10.2. A pharmacist preceptor shall endeavour to educate and train future pharmacists to meet prescribed competency standards.

ETHICAL CODE ON ADVERTISING

Ethical Code on Advertising by Pharmacists

1. Definition of Advertising

- 1.1. Advertising includes but is not limited to all forms of printed and electronic media such as:
 - a. Advertisements in newspapers (including classified advertisements), magazines, brochures, leaflets, circulars, mailings, posters, store value or membership cards (including fare cards, cash cards), tickets and other printed publications;
 - b. Advertisements via electronic media or facsimile transmissions;
 - c. Advertisements displayed on buildings and vehicles;
 - d. Television, radio, cinema and video commercials;
 - e. Digital / Electronic communications in every form, design and context including the world-wide web (Internet) and telephone;
 - f. Advertisements in non-broadcast electronic media such as computer games;
 - g. Mail orders and mailing lists;
 - h. Sales promotions.
- 1.2. Advertising also includes information and comments provided by pharmacists for media reports, magazine articles or advertorials; either published or by word of mouth on particular pharmaceutical / health related products or services.
- 1.3. This definition excludes information given to persons during consultations where such material is designed to provide the person with clinical or technical information about health conditions or procedures, and where the person is afforded sufficient opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the material presented.

2. General Principles in Advertising

- 2.1. In general, pharmacists may provide information about their qualifications, areas of practice, practice arrangements and contact details. Such information, where permitted, shall:
- a. be factually accurate and capable of being substantiated, and shall not be exaggerated, false, misleading or deceptive;
 - b. not be offensive, designed to impress or presented in bad taste which will undermine the honour and dignity of the profession;
 - c. not contain any indication that compares and contrasts the services between pharmacists and other service providers;
 - d. not contain any superlatives or laudatory statements to describe the services of the pharmacist.

3. Professional Obligations

3.1. Qualifications and Training

- 3.1.1. Pharmacists shall state clearly their professional qualifications or training. A pharmacist who does not hold specialist registration or an endorsement shall not claim or hold himself or herself out to be a specialist or to hold endorsed registration, either explicitly or by implication, or attempt to convey that perception to the public.
- 3.1.2. If pharmacists adopt the title 'Dr' in their advertising, they shall make it clear by including a reference to their qualification whenever the title is used, such as:
- Dr John Ong (PharmD)
 - Dr Alan Tan (PhD)
- 3.1.3. Pharmacists on the specialist register could make a reference to their specialty whenever the title is used, such as:
- Carmen Lim (Geriatrics Specialist Pharmacist)
 - Dr Deborah Chua (PharmD) (Cardiology Specialist Pharmacist)

3.2. Services

- 3.2.1. Pharmacists shall always consider their professional, ethical and legal obligations when advertising their services. They shall be aware that

consumers of health services may not be in a position to judge the merits of advertised services, making them more vulnerable to believe the advertising claims.

- 3.2.2. When advertising a service, a pharmacist shall ensure that he is competent by reason of his education, training and/or experience to provide the service advertised, or to act in the manner or professional capacity advertised.
- 3.2.3. Pharmacists shall be certain that they can substantiate any claims made in advertising material, particularly in relation to outcomes of treatment, whether implied or explicitly stated.

3.3. Products

- 3.3.1. Pharmacists shall not advertise products in a manner that could be considered as taking advantage of limited consumer understanding of the medicinal and/or health related products.
- 3.3.2. Pharmacists shall not:
 - a. issue or cause to be issued any medical advertisement; or
 - b. conduct any sales promotion,

unless it complies with the relevant legislation such as the Medicines Act, Health Products Act or Medicines (Advertisement and Sale) Act, or advertising requirements of the Health Sciences Authority and the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore.

3.4. Premises

- 3.4.1. Pharmacists shall not make themselves available for 'advertorials', media reports or magazine articles to promote particular health services or therapeutic products. However, comments made by pharmacists that are part of any independent news reporting are excluded.
- 3.4.2. This Ethical Code on Advertising by Pharmacists would not have jurisdiction over an advertisement that is put up by a pharmacy business, and not by the pharmacist himself.
- 3.4.3. It must be noted that such advertisements would not be exempted from the restrictions in the Medicines (Advertisement and Sale) Act. Pharmacists employed in the premises are required to review the content of any advertising of their services, and will have to take reasonable steps to address any non-compliance or refer it to the appropriate person(s).

4. What Can / Cannot be Done

4.1. Public speaking, broadcasting and publications

- 4.1.1. All information to fellow pharmacists, other healthcare professionals or the public shall conform to the standards referred to in the section on “General Principles in Advertising”. This includes information or advice given in the context of education for pharmacists, other healthcare professionals or the public, such as talks, interviews and seminars organized by professional bodies. Such information shall come with the added responsibility of being objective and not laudatory or misleading.
- 4.1.2. Articles in the mass media which feature pharmacists shall also conform to the standards stated above. A pharmacist shall ensure that he does not solicit or encourage the public to seek consultation or treatment from him or the organization he is associated with. Only the pharmacist's name, registered field of practice and place of practice may be mentioned in such instances.
- 4.1.3. If members of the public personally approach pharmacists after public talks and request for information about themselves and their services, such information may be provided but shall conform to the standards on information provision described in the section on “General Principles in Advertising”.
- 4.1.4. Images used to illustrate pharmaceutical services can be used in educational talks organized by professional bodies or healthcare institutions, or in professional journals. However, such images shall only be used judiciously in the public media, where they could be deemed to be laudatory (including statements of prominence or uniqueness) of the pharmacist named.

4.2. Platforms for listing service information

- 4.2.1. The Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics (Publicity) Regulations 2004 allows healthcare establishments to provide information about their services through media such as newspapers, directories, medical journals, magazines, brochures, leaflets, pamphlets, and the internet. Publicity of services in brochures, leaflets or pamphlets shall be in line with the provisions under The Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics (Publicity) Regulations 2004.

4.3. Pharmacists associated with healthcare organizations

- 4.3.1. Pharmacists who have any financial or professional relationship with organizations offering pharmaceutical services are responsible for the

organization's publicity about themselves. They shall exercise due diligence to ensure that all these conform to the standards spelt out above under “Qualifications and Training” and “Services”.

- 4.3.2. If any questions are raised about a pharmacist's conduct in this respect, it will not be sufficient for the pharmacist to plead lack of awareness of the nature or content of the organization's publicity materials, or lack of ability to exert any influence over it.

4.4. Provision of information through web sites

- 4.4.1. Pharmacists may use websites to provide information to colleagues and the public. These websites may be about the healthcare organization or pharmacist or about a pharmaceutical topic. The standards of information as spelt out above under “Qualifications and Training” and “Services” also apply to websites.
- 4.4.2. Pharmacists who publish information on a website have the responsibility to ensure that the information about themselves and their practices contained on the website conform to these standards.

4.5. Electronic communication with patients

- 4.5.1. Viewers of websites may be invited to ask for more information about their health conditions through a general web-chat or e-mail. In such situations, the pharmacists shall abide by the Singapore Pharmacy Council Code of Ethics.

5. Consequences of Breach of Advertising Requirements

- 5.1. If any pharmacist contravenes the above guidelines, he may be subjected to a disciplinary hearing from the Singapore Pharmacy Council which can result in disciplinary measures such as warning, suspension or removal from the Register of Pharmacists.

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The Code of Ethics Committee (2013 – 2015)

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