

Council meeting 6 & 7 June 2006

PUBLIC BUSINESS

Code of Ethics Review

Purpose

To report the Code of Ethics Review Working Group's proposals for the draft structure of the revised code of ethics and seek Council's agreement to consult on these.

Recommendation

Council is asked to agree to consult on the Code of Ethics Review Working Group's proposals for the draft structure of the revised code of ethics.

Strategic objective domain

- Influencing the development of the pharmacist to play amore inclusive part in healthcare, public health and social care
- Improving member engagement in the work of the Society
- An organisation that consistently performs as a regulator, professional representative leader and publisher

1. Background

In August 2005 Council agreed that

- A fundamental review of the Code of Ethics and Standards and Code of Ethics for Pharmacy Technicians be undertaken.
- A working group be formed to carry out the review process.
- The Society engage the membership throughout the review process.

Since that time a working group has been formed under the chairmanship of Professor Sheila McLean (Director, Institute of Law and Ethics in Medicine, University of Glasgow). There has been an initial consultation to seek views on the benefits and limitations of the current codes and ask what core principles and values should underpin the pharmacy profession. A patient workshop was also held to explore the key values, attitudes and behaviours that patients expect of pharmacists. The working group have considered the responses to the initial consultation and patient workshop, together with research information, to begin to establish the fundamental requirements of the revised code of ethics.

2. Proposals of the Working Group

In recognition of the changing context of modern pharmacy practice and the increasing emphasis on professional accountability and judgement, the Working Group believes that any attempt to write a comprehensive book of rules to cover every situation a pharmacist or pharmacy technician may face is counter-productive. Instead it is proposed that the code of ethics should provide a framework of ethical principles within which the whole profession should operate. The Working Group is proposing that;

- The revised code should be based on a set of over-arching principles that will inform the conduct, performance and practice of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

- The code of ethics should promote and support a culture of accountability and professional judgement.
- The principles of the code should be applicable to all sectors of the pharmacy profession and should not need to change much over time.
- Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should be required to apply the principles of the code to their professional activities, irrespective of whether their role involves in direct patient care.
- There should be one code of ethics for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians on the basis that the same ethical principles will apply to the whole of pharmacy, even though how they are applied will depend on an individual's role and circumstances.
- The code of ethics should be clear and understandable for both the profession and members of the public.
- The code of ethics will continue to inform decision making at the various stages of fitness to practise procedures and failure to adhere to the principles of the code could put a pharmacist's or pharmacy technician's registration at risk.
- Both practising and not practising pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will continue to be required to comply with the code.
- The code of ethics should not include detailed technical guidance, but will act as the core document that will be supplemented by further professional standards and guidance where required.
- Where there is a need for more detailed standards or guidance on complex issues or specific areas of practice, this should be produced separately from the code. The status of these supporting documents (e.g. whether they are mandatory or good practice requirements) should be clearly indicated.
- The revised code should be called the 'Code of Ethics' to reflect that fact that the code does not contain detailed technical requirements.

3. The Draft Structure

Appendix 1 illustrates the approach proposed by the Working Group. Pharmacists' and pharmacy technicians' professional and personal conduct will be judged against the code. This is reflected in the statement defining the purpose of the code. It is intended that the statement of purpose will form part of the introduction to the revised code. The introduction will also contain other preamble, for example, to make clear that the requirements of the code are not an exhaustive list and state the requirement for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to read and understand the requirements of the code. This text will be developed at future meetings of the working group.

The draft structure is based on 7 principles of ethical practice

- **Make the care of patients your first concern**
- **Exercise your professional judgement in the interests of patients and the public**
- **Demonstrate respect for people**
- **Promote the rights of patients to participate in decisions about their care**
- **Maintain your professional knowledge and competence**
- **Be honest and trustworthy**
- **Take responsibility for your working practices**

Each principle will be supported by requirements that detail the types of actions and behaviours expected of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians when applying the principles in practice. The exact wording of these requirements has still to be developed, but some brief statements have been provided to help illustrate the types of requirements that may fall under each principle. The requirements are not an exhaustive list and pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be expected to comply with relevant standards and guidance issued by the Society, or other organisations.

It is recognised that there will be specific areas of practice or professional activities that will require more detailed standards and guidance than will be provided in the code. Some guidance requirements will be of a technical nature, while others will relate to principles of the code of ethics. The Society currently produces a range of guidance documents and it is intended that the content and status of these will be reviewed in light of the changes to the structure of the code. With regard to new guidance documents, it is proposed that priority be given to developing standards and/or guidance for complex issues where no other guidance currently exists, for example, on patient consent, corporate practice and the responsibilities of superintendent pharmacists.

4. Consultation

As the draft structure is very different from the current codes of ethics it is proposed that the Society should consult with the membership and the public on this at an early stage. This will not only help engage the profession and the public throughout the review process, but will also enable us to identify whether the revised structure will meet the needs of the profession and the public before more detailed work is undertaken. It is intended that a 3 month consultation on the draft structure will begin in mid June. This consultation will be published in *The Pharmaceutical Journal* on 16 June 2006. It will also be available to complete on-line and copies will be sent to key stakeholders. A further consultation on the detail of the content and wording of the revised code is planned for later this year.

5. Risk Implications

The Society needs to ensure it provides a robust and enduring ethical framework of professional obligations that it expects pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to operate within. This must continue to reflect and support the roles and responsibilities of the profession and must be applicable to all fields of practice. Failure to do so could risk patient safety and damage the public's trust in the pharmacy profession.

6. Resources Implications

The resource implications for this consultation have been built into the 2006 budget.

7. Recommendation

Council is asked to agree to consult on the Code of Ethics Review Working Group's proposals for the draft structure of the revised code of ethics.

Lynsey Balmer
Head of Professional Ethics

Appendix 1

Draft Structure for Consultation**Purpose of the Code**

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain seeks to guide pharmacists and pharmacy technicians so that they:

- use their knowledge and skills for the benefit of patients and the public,
- maintain good relationships with patients and professional colleagues, and
- act in a way that ensures confidence and trust in the pharmacy profession.

The Code of Ethics sets out the principles that all pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should follow. Their professional and personal conduct will be judged against this Code.

The code forms the Society's core guidance on the conduct, practice and performance expected of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians and is also designed to meet the Society's obligations under The Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians Order 2006 and other relevant legislation.

Key principles for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians

- **Make the care of patients your first concern**
- **Exercise your professional judgment in the interests of patients and the public**
- **Demonstrate respect for people**
- **Promote the rights of patients to participate in decisions about their care**
- **Maintain your professional knowledge and competence**
- **Be honest and trustworthy**
- **Take responsibility for your working practices**

1. Make the care of patients your first concern

- *Provide a good standard of practice and care.*
- *Obtain sufficient information to assess patients' needs.*
- *Encourage the safe and effective use of medicines. Be satisfied about the clinical appropriateness of medicine supplies and ensure patients know how to use their medicines safely and effectively.*
- *Refer patients to other health or social care professionals, or other relevant organisations, where necessary.*
- *Safeguard and promote the safety and wellbeing of children and other vulnerable patients.*
- *Ensure the integrity and quality of products to be supplied to patients*
- *Maintain accurate and appropriate records.*
- *Ensure access to the facilities and equipment necessary to provide services to professionally accepted standards.*
- *Adhere to clinical governance, audit and risk management procedures.*

2. Exercise your professional judgment in the interests of patients and the public

- *Consider and act in the best interests of both individual patients and the public.*
- *Promote the health of individuals, the community and society as a whole*
- *Use resources appropriately and allocate them with care.*
- *Be prepared to challenge the judgment of other healthcare professionals if you have reason to believe that patient safety would be compromised.*
- *Ensure your professional judgment is not impaired by personal or professional interests, incentives, targets or similar measures. Declare any personal or professional interests to those who may be affected.*
- *Ensure that, if you have a conscientious objection to particular services, this is clearly known by your patients and employer, and have in place the means to make a referral to another relevant professional within an appropriate timeframe.*

3. Demonstrate respect for people

- *Respect patients' dignity and privacy, including their right to confidentiality*
- *Ensure that patients and their carers are given sufficient information about their treatment and care to inform their decision whether or not to consent to it, and be satisfied that they are competent to make such decisions.*
- *Treat patients and their carers politely and considerately.*
- *Recognise diversity and respect the cultural differences, values and beliefs of others.*
- *Do not allow your views about a person's lifestyle, beliefs, race, gender, age, sexuality or disability, or other perceived status to prejudice their treatment or care.*
- *Ensure appropriate levels of privacy for patient consultations.*
- *Prevent accidental disclosure/ unauthorised access to patient information.*
- *Maintain appropriate professional boundaries in relationships with patients and take special care when dealing with vulnerable individuals.*

4. Promote the rights of patients to participate in decisions about their care

- *Where appropriate, work in partnership with patients and their carers to manage the patient's treatment and care.*
- *Listen to and be able to communicate effectively with patients and those who care for them.*
- *As far as possible provide appropriate up to date information in a way that patients or their carers can understand.*
- *Ensure that relevant information is appropriately shared with other health professionals involved in the care of the patient.*
- *Consider factors that may prevent or deter individuals from obtaining or complying with their treatment.*

5. Maintain your professional knowledge and competence

- *Maintain and improve the quality of your work by keeping your knowledge and skills up to date.*
- *Appropriately apply your knowledge and skills to your professional responsibilities.*
- *Recognise and work within the limits of your professional knowledge and competence.*
- *Undertake and maintain records of continuing professional development relevant to your field of practice.*
- *Practise only if you are fit and competent to do so, and declare any circumstances that may affect your professional performance or bring the profession into*

disrepute including ill health, convictions and findings by other regulatory bodies or organisations.

6. Be honest and trustworthy

- *Uphold public trust and confidence in the pharmacy profession by acting with honesty and integrity.*
- *Do not abuse your professional standing.*
- *Adhere to accepted standards of professional conduct and comply with legal requirements, relevant mandatory professional standards and accepted best practice guidance.*
- *Be accurate and impartial in relation to teaching or publication or provision of information.*
- *Honour commitments, agreements and arrangements for the provision of professional services.*
- *Respond appropriately and courteously to complaints and criticism.*
- *Take appropriate action if something goes wrong or if concerns about systems, resources, or the conduct, competence or health of others are reported to you.*
- *Co-operate with investigations into your or another health professional's fitness to practise and abide by any undertakings or conditions placed on your practice.*

7. Take responsibility for your working practices

- *Ensure that all professional activities undertaken by you, or under your control, are fully covered by professional indemnity arrangements.*
- *Treat colleagues with respect and work effectively with others in ways that serve the best interests of patients.*
- *Share relevant knowledge and skills with others and support colleagues with their learning and training.*
- *Ensure that both you and those you employ or supervise have sufficient language competency and are able to communicate effectively with other colleagues and the public.*
- *Take responsibility for all work done under your supervision and ensure that individuals to whom you delegate tasks have the necessary competence and have undertaken, or are in the process of undertaking, the training required for their duties.*
- *Be satisfied that appropriate standard operating procedures exist and are adhered to and ensure that clear lines of accountability and verifiable audit trails are in place.*
- *Ensure that your actions do not prevent others from complying with their legal and professional obligations or present a risk to patient safety*
- *Raise concerns if policies, systems, working conditions, or the actions, professional performance or health of others may compromise patient safety and ensure that systems are in place to report these concerns.*
- *Be satisfied that there is an effective complaints procedure where you work.*