

The Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance for Pharmacists in Northern Ireland

January 2026

Pharmaceutical Society NI

Protecting · Registering · Regulating

www.psni.org.uk

Accessible Plain Text Version

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1. About Us

Our primary purpose is to ensure that pharmacists are fit to practise and deliver high quality safe care to patients.

The Pharmaceutical Society Northern Ireland (the Society) is the regulatory body for pharmacists and pharmacy premises in Northern Ireland.

1.1 What We Do

It is the organisation's responsibility to protect and maintain public safety in pharmacy by:

- setting and promoting standards for pharmacists' admission to the Register and for remaining on the Register
- maintaining a publicly accessible Register of pharmacists and pharmacy premises
- investigating concerns about the fitness to practise of pharmacists and taking action to protect the public
- overseeing pharmacist education and training in Northern Ireland, including managing the training and registration pathway for trainee pharmacists — this encompasses approving Foundation Training Year (FTY) providers, maintaining the Student Register, overseeing the Common Registration Assessment and registering pharmacists upon successful completion
- providing vital professional leadership functions through the Pharmacy Forum NI

2. Introduction

Pharmacists play a vital role in patient care and public health in Northern Ireland. As their scope of practice continues to evolve, including responsibilities such as prescribing and the delivery of enhanced services, pharmacists are increasingly integrated into multidisciplinary teams and entrusted with greater clinical autonomy.

These developments position pharmacists as accessible, patient-facing healthcare professionals who deliver safe, effective, and compassionate care.

With this expanded role comes a continued responsibility to meet the evolving expectations of patients, colleagues, and the wider health and care system. The standards outlined in this Code provide a clear and supportive framework to help pharmacists uphold professionalism, act with integrity, and foster public trust. By applying these standards and associated guidance, pharmacists can practise safely and ethically, while contributing to improved health outcomes and equitable care across Northern Ireland.

3. The Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance

This Code is issued under the authority of Paragraph 1(1a) of Schedule 3 to the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended). It mandates the Council to set standards relating to the conduct, ethics, and performance expected of registered persons. Compliance with this Code is a requirement for all registrants.

3.1 Applying the Standards — Professional Judgement

Professional judgement is essential to making safe and ethical decisions in patient care. It involves applying knowledge, clinical expertise, and ethical principles to make choices that are in the best interests of the person receiving care.

This Code provides a framework to support pharmacists in exercising professional judgement. Throughout the standards, the phrase “you must, where appropriate” is used to reflect both mandatory responsibilities and recommended best practice. This wording recognises that while some actions are required and non-negotiable, others rely on context and professional discretion. Pharmacists are expected to apply the standards responsibly, using their expertise, experience, and ethical judgement to decide what is appropriate in each situation.

3.2 Pharmacy Students and Trainee Pharmacists

The Code is integral to the learning and practice of pharmacy students and trainee pharmacists. Their activities and behaviours impact public confidence in the profession. Breaches of the Code during training are considered upon registration.

3.3 Accountability — Fitness to Practise

Fitness to Practise proceedings protect the public and uphold professional standards. All investigations by the Pharmaceutical Society NI will be conducted in a fair, transparent, and timely manner. Where a registered person is alleged to have failed to comply with the standards set out in this Code, such failure does not constitute misconduct. However, it may be taken into account in any Fitness to Practise proceedings brought under the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended). Where appropriate, outcomes of these proceedings may include advice, warnings, conditions on practice, suspension, or removal from the Register.

3.4 Patients' and Members of the Public's Rights

Patients and members of the public can raise concerns if they feel their care, dealings and interactions did not meet the standards of the Code. Concerns can be raised directly with the Pharmaceutical Society NI via phone, email, or mail.

4. Standards

The seven standards in this Code together support safe and effective care:

- **Provide Person Centred Care:** Take steps to ensure care is safe, effective, compassionate and inclusive.
- **Act with Professionalism and Integrity:** Demonstrate professionalism and always be open and honest.
- **Communicate Effectively:** Use clear, appropriate and respectful communication with patients, colleagues and all those contributing to care.
- **Collaborate with Colleagues:** Foster teamwork to support safe and effective care.
- **Raise Concerns:** Speak up about unsafe practices or risks.
- **Commit to Development:** Maintain and improve your professional skills and knowledge.
- **Lead by Example:** Guide and support colleagues through positive engagement.

Standard 1: Provide Person Centred Care

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists put the person at the centre of their practice, ensuring care is compassionate, respectful, inclusive and tailored to individual needs.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Obtain patient consent before providing care and pharmacy services, in line with statutory and professional requirements.
2. Provide the necessary information for patients to make informed decisions about their care.
3. Involve and empower patients in decision making about their care.
4. Respect a patient's right to refuse treatment.

5. Accommodate patients' additional needs, including language, learning, or physical requirements.
6. Be inclusive, accommodating patients' additional needs, and respecting values, beliefs and cultural backgrounds, treating all patients fairly and sensitively.
7. Ensure your personal values and beliefs do not compromise appropriate clinical care. In cases of conscientious objection, you must inform the patient and take best steps to arrange referral to an alternative provider, taking best steps to ensure their care is not compromised.

Standard 2: Act with Professionalism and Integrity

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists demonstrate professionalism and are open and honest.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Only practise when competent and fit to do so.
2. Ensure your mental and physical health does not impair your ability to practise and seek support if you believe your fitness to practise may be affected.
3. Inform the Pharmaceutical Society NI, or other relevant authorities, of any circumstances that may affect your fitness to practise.
4. Apply knowledge, clinical expertise and ethical principles to make informed decisions.
5. Ensure personal or commercial interests do not interfere with professional judgement.
6. Maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries and avoid treating family members except in unavoidable circumstances.
7. Uphold high standards of personal conduct, both inside and outside the workplace, in a way that maintains confidence in the profession.
8. Ensure that all communications, including those via digital and social media platforms, maintain public confidence in pharmacy professionals.

9. Keep records that are accurate, completed at the time of care, and ensure patient information is kept confidential.
10. Ensure the accuracy of information provided to patients and colleagues, including that generated or supported by digital systems.
11. Perform regular risk assessments to ensure safe practice.
12. Collaborate with employer, regulatory, or legal investigations.
13. Maintain appropriate professional indemnity insurance.

Standard 3: Communicate Effectively

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists communicate effectively to understand and meet the needs of people they care for and work with.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Seek to understand patients' needs, values and preferences.
2. Adapt communication methods to optimise interactions with people you care for and work with, by meeting their individual needs.
3. Demonstrate empathy, active listening and compassion in patient interactions.
4. Ensure patients are informed and empowered to make choices about their care.
5. Engage patients in meaningful discussions about their treatment options.
6. Be polite and respectful toward people of all cultural backgrounds and beliefs.
7. Communicate clearly, respectfully and in a timely manner with colleagues and other healthcare professionals to support safe and effective care.
8. Maintain patient confidentiality and handle sensitive information responsibly.

Standard 4: Collaborate with Colleagues

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists work collaboratively with colleagues to promote a culture of learning and improvement.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
2. Treat colleagues and others with respect and fairness and challenge discriminatory or unacceptable behaviour.
3. Understand and work within your own boundaries of competence, while being mindful of your colleagues own professional boundaries.
4. Delegate tasks to trained colleagues and know when to seek support.
5. Support the training and development of colleagues and trainee pharmacists.
6. Share relevant knowledge and expertise to support good health outcomes.
7. Assist colleagues experiencing performance or health issues, prioritising patient safety.
8. Collaborate with other healthcare professionals to ensure comprehensive patient care.
9. Refer patients to other healthcare professionals when necessary.

Standard 5: Raise Concerns

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists raise concerns when things go wrong.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Be open and honest with patients when errors occur, including offering an apology and appropriate remedies.
2. Take steps to correct errors, reduce recurrence and improve practice through a process of system learning.
3. Report practices, policies, or conditions that may compromise patient care or safety, using your professional judgement to follow the appropriate local or regulatory channels.
4. Raise concerns about colleagues whose performance or health may compromise patient care or safety.

5. Speak up about any issue or practices, policies or decisions, that could affect patient safety or the quality of care.
6. Support patients and colleagues who raise genuine concerns.
7. Act in line with safeguarding responsibilities and professional duty of candour.

Standard 6: Commit to Development

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists engage in Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Fulfil your CPD requirements.
2. Reflect regularly on your practice and seek areas for improvement.
3. Stay up to date with relevant legislation, standards and guidance.
4. Where possible, contribute to creating a learning environment for colleagues and trainee pharmacists.
5. Reflect on feedback from patients, peers and supervisors to inform your development.

Standard 7: Lead by Example

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacists demonstrate leadership in their practice.

To meet this standard, you must, where appropriate:

1. Consistently demonstrate high standards of professional behaviour and ethics in your practice.
2. Provide guidance, encouragement and support to colleagues and trainees.
3. Foster a culture of professionalism, respect and accountability within the workplace.

4. Challenge discrimination and unacceptable behaviour and contribute to a psychologically safe environment where dignity, respect and the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are upheld.
5. Support initiatives that improve patient care and pharmacy practice.

Glossary

Accountability

The responsibility of pharmacists to answer for their actions, decisions and professional conduct. It includes being transparent, accepting responsibility and taking steps to correct mistakes.

Clinical Expertise

The knowledge and skills pharmacists acquire through education, training and experience. It enables them to provide high-quality care and make informed clinical decisions.

Compassionate Care

Care delivered through relationships based on empathy, respect and dignity, recognising the individual needs and experiences of each patient.

Conscientious Objection

The refusal to perform a particular action based on personal beliefs or values. Pharmacists must ensure patient care is not compromised by arranging timely referral to an alternative provider.

CPD (Continuing Professional Development)

Ongoing education and training activities that pharmacists must engage in to maintain and enhance their professional competence throughout their careers.

Delegation

The process of assigning tasks to appropriately trained colleagues while retaining overall responsibility for the outcome and ensuring patient safety.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Creating a workplace and care environment where all individuals feel respected, valued and able to contribute, regardless of background, identity, or beliefs.

Ethical Principles

Fundamental guidelines that influence decision-making and behaviour in healthcare. These include autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.

Fitness to Practise

The ability of a pharmacist to practise safely and effectively, considering their health, behaviour and professional performance. This includes being free from impairments that could affect their duties.

Informed Consent

The process of providing patients with clear, relevant information about their care, including risks and benefits, so they can make informed decisions and agree to treatment.

Leadership in Pharmacy

The ability to guide, influence and support colleagues and trainees. It involves promoting professionalism, advocating for patient safety, driving improvement in care and leading by example.

Multidisciplinary Team

A group of healthcare professionals from different specialties working together to provide comprehensive, coordinated patient care.

Patient Confidentiality

The ethical and legal duty to keep patient information private and secure, protecting it from unauthorised access or disclosure.

Pharmaceutical Society NI

The regulatory body for pharmacists and registered pharmacies in Northern Ireland. It ensures that pharmacists meet professional standards and protects public health.

Professional Duty of Candour

The ethical and professional obligation of pharmacists to be open and honest when things go wrong in the course of care. This includes informing the patient, offering an apology, explaining what happened and taking steps to put matters right. It supports transparency, accountability, and learning and is essential to maintaining public trust in the profession.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Insurance that provides coverage for legal costs and claims for damages arising from professional negligence or malpractice.

Professional Judgement

The application of knowledge, clinical expertise and ethical principles to make informed decisions in patient care. It involves critical thinking and sound decision-making.

Reflective Practitioner

A professional who continuously evaluates their practice, seeks feedback, and engages in activities to improve their skills and knowledge through self-assessment and learning from experience.

Risk Assessment

The process of identifying, evaluating and managing potential risks to patient safety or service delivery, to ensure safe and effective practice.

Scope of Practice

The activities that a healthcare professional is authorised to perform based on their qualifications, training and experience.

Speaking Up / Whistleblowing

Raising concerns about unsafe, unethical or inappropriate practices that may affect patient care, staff wellbeing, or professional standards. It includes reporting issues internally or to external bodies when necessary.

Systems Learning

An approach to improvement that focuses on understanding how different parts of a healthcare system interact and contribute to outcomes. It involves analysing incidents, errors, or near misses not just at the individual level, but across processes, teams and structures to identify patterns and implement changes that enhance safety, quality and effectiveness.