

GOOD MEDICAL PRACTICE

8 Professional behaviour

8.1 Introduction

In professional life, doctors must display a standard of behaviour that warrants the trust and respect of the community. This includes observing and practising the principles of ethical conduct.

The guidance contained in this section emphasises the core qualities and characteristics of good doctors outlined in Section 1.4.

8.2 Professional boundaries

Professional boundaries are integral to a good doctor–patient relationship. They promote good care for patients and protect both parties. Good medical practice involves:

- 8.2.1 Maintaining professional boundaries.
- 8.2.2 Never using your professional position to establish or pursue a sexual, exploitative or other inappropriate relationship with anybody under your care. This includes those close to the patient, such as their carer, guardian or spouse or the parent of a child patient. Specific guidelines on sexual boundaries have been developed by the Medical Board of Australia under the National Law.¹²
- 8.2.3 Avoiding expressing your personal beliefs to your patients in ways that exploit their vulnerability or that are likely to cause them distress.

8.3 Reporting obligations

Doctors have statutory obligations under the National Law to report various proceedings or findings to the Medical Board of Australia.¹³ They also have professional obligations to report to the Board and their employer if they have had any limitations placed on their practice. Good medical practice involves:

- 8.3.1 Being aware of these reporting obligations
- 8.3.2 Complying with any reporting obligations that apply to your practice.
- 8.3.3 Seeking advice from the Medical Board or your professional indemnity insurer if you are unsure about your obligations.

8.4 Medical records

Maintaining clear and accurate medical records is essential for the continuing good care of patients. Good medical practice involves:

- 8.4.1 Keeping accurate, up-to-date and legible records that report relevant details of clinical history, clinical findings, investigations, information given to patients, medication and other management in a form that can be understood by other health practitioners.
- 8.4.2 Ensuring that your medical records are held securely and are not subject to unauthorised access.
- 8.4.3 Ensuring that your medical records show respect for your patients and do not include demeaning or derogatory remarks.
- 8.4.4 Ensuring that the records are sufficient to facilitate continuity of patient care.
- 8.4.5 Making records at the time of the events, or as soon as possible afterwards.
- 8.4.6 Recognising patients' right to access information contained in their medical records and facilitating that access.
- 8.4.7 Promptly facilitating the transfer of health information when requested by the patient.

8.5 Insurance

You have a professional obligation to ensure that your practice is appropriately covered by professional indemnity insurance. You must meet the requirements set out in the *Registration standard for professional indemnity insurance* established by the Medical Board of Australia under the National Law.¹⁴

¹² Section 39 of the National Law and *Sexual boundaries: guidelines for doctors* issued by the Medical Board of Australia [available at: www.medicalboard.gov.au].

¹³ Sections 130, 140–143 of the National Law and *Guidelines for mandatory notifications* issued by the Medical Board of Australia [available at: www.medicalboard.gov.au].

¹⁴ Section 38(1)(a) of the National Law and registration standards issued by the Medical Board of Australia [available at: www.medicalboard.gov.au].