



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

**CODE OF CONDUCT,
ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE FOR MEDICAL AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

**BHUTAN MEDICAL AND HEALTH COUNCIL
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN**

CODE OF CONDUCT, ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE FOR MEDICAL AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Bhutan Medical and Health Council
Royal Government of Bhutan

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PRELIMINARY

Under the power vested in the General Body by the Chapter VI Section (i) of the Medical and Health Council Act 2002, Kingdom of Bhutan, the General Body of the Council during its 14th General Body Meeting held on 25th August 2021 approved this document.

Short title

Code of Conduct, Ethics and Etiquette for Medical and Health Professionals (2021).

Commencement

This document shall come into effect from 1st January 2022.

Supersession

This document shall supersede the provisions of existing rules and regulations, guidelines, notifications and circulars that are inconsistent with this document.

PREAMBLE

Reaffirming the increasing relevance for the medical and health professionals to conform to the highest possible standard of ethical code of conduct in order to provide care to the patients;

Believing that the health providers are a privileged group in having entrusted upon by the patients for their health care needs, and with such privileges having given more responsibilities;

Considering the need for healthcare to keep pace with the changing social values, scientific and technological advances and evolving laws; and

Acknowledging the relationship between patients and medical and health professionals is a partnership based on mutual respect, trust and collaboration;

Therefore, the Bhutan Medical and Health Council promulgates a set of ethical principles, etiquette and code of conduct to guide the medical and health professionals in their relationships with patients, colleagues and the society.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

This Code of Conduct, Ethics and Etiquette shall apply to all medical and health professionals registered with the Bhutan Medical and Health Council and practising in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

This Code of Conduct, Ethics and Etiquette is promulgated to promote good conduct and ethical behaviour among the medical and health professionals while dealing with patients, colleagues and society.

This is expected to promote the respect, trust and integrity of medical and health professionals thereby contributing towards enhancing the quality of healthcare services for public health safety.

CODE OF PROFESSIONAL FIDELITY

(Declaration of Geneva, 1948; Editorially revised by 68th World Medical Association General Assembly, October, 2017, adopted as Medical and Health Professional Pledge in Bhutan)

1. I SOLEMNLY PLEDGE to dedicate my life to the service of humanity;
2. THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MY PATIENT will be my first consideration;
3. I WILL RESPECT the autonomy and dignity of my patient;
4. I WILL MAINTAIN the utmost respect for human life;
5. I WILL NOT PERMIT considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing, or any other factor to intervene between my duty and my patient;
6. I WILL RESPECT the secrets that are confided in me, even after the patient has died;
7. I WILL PRACTISE my profession with conscience and dignity and in accordance with good medical practice;
8. I WILL FOSTER the honour and noble traditions of the medical profession;
9. I WILL GIVE to my teachers, colleagues, and students the respect and gratitude that is their due;
10. I WILL SHARE my medical knowledge for the benefit of the patient and the advancement of healthcare;
11. I WILL ATTEND TO my own health, well-being, and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard;
12. I WILL NOT USE my medical knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties, even under threat;
13. I MAKE THESE PROMISES solemnly, freely, and upon my honour;

14. I solemnly swear/affirm that I shall uphold the sovereignty and integrity of Bhutan faithfully, conscientiously discharge my duties in the service of the Tsa-wa-sum and perform the duties of my office without fear or favour to the best of my ability, and that I shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of Bhutan;

CHAPTER I - GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS

CODE OF ETHICS

1. Every medical and health professional shall apply their general ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice in both patient care and research.
2. The overriding duty of medical and health professionals shall be to preserve life, promote health and alleviate sufferings.
3. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 3.1 Be committed to public services;
 - 3.2 Issue certificates or reports in his/her professional capacity, which contains true statements;
 - 3.3 Refrain from associations in the form of sexual relationship or criminal association with patients at the material time;
 - 3.4 Act responsibly while using social media related to patient;
 - 3.5 Not tolerate or be a party to false pretences, forgery, fraud, theft, counterfeiting, indecent behaviour or assault;
 - 3.6 Keep proper records of patients for a minimum period as prescribed in relevant Regulation and Guidelines with proper documentation;
 - 3.7 Follow their respective national standard operating procedures (SOP);
 - 3.8 Uphold the duty of candour and raise concerns appropriately;
 - 3.9 Ensure the presence of a female attendant or spouse during examination/procedure on a female patient when examined by male professional;
 - 3.10 Act appropriately to protect patients from risks, if there is a good reason to believe that a colleague/group of colleagues are incompetent to practise;

- 3.11 Place one's professional duties and responsibilities to the patients above the commercial interests;
- 3.12 Be knowledgeable about the subject material;
- 3.13 Not advertise or promote one's own profession other than to create public awareness on public health;
- 3.14 Ensure that personal beliefs do not prejudice patients' care and intervene if he/she sees other team members doing this;
- 3.15 Avoid abusing his/her professional position;and
- 3.16 Not publish photographs of patients without permission or without covering the identification.

CODE OF ETIQUETTE

4. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 4.1 Attend duties in professional attire or formal dress;
 - 4.2 Be a role model for health and hygiene;
 - 4.3 Abstain from use of psychotropic or habit-forming drugs; and
 - 4.4 Refrain from smoking, chewing "doma", tobacco and consuming alcoholic drinks at the workplace.

CHAPTER II - DUTIES TOWARDS PATIENT

PATIENT CARE

5. The medical and health professional shall:
 - 5.1 Consider first the well-being of the patient;
 - 5.2 Treat patient with empathy, compassion and respect;
 - 5.3 Approach health care as a collaboration between patient and the service provider;
 - 5.4 Practice the science and art of medicine to the best of one's ability;
 - 5.5 Take appropriate and prompt action wherever evidence suggests the existence of a condition that requires urgent medical intervention;
 - 5.6 Make conscientious assessment of the history, symptoms and signs of a patient's condition;
 - 5.7 Order appropriate investigations and provide necessary treatment along with regular review and ensure follow up;
 - 5.8 Ensure that the patient is managed according to the best-proven diagnostic and therapeutic methods and that the patient's comfort and dignity are maintained at all times;
 - 5.9 Maintain accurate contemporaneous clinical records;
 - 5.10 Ensure that medical and health professionals upon whom one calls to assist in the care of patients are appropriately qualified;
 - 5.11 Refrain from exploitation of patient for any reason;
 - 5.12 Avoid engaging in sexual relationship with the patient;
 - 5.13 Refrain from discrimination of patient on the grounds of age, sex, ethnic, religion, relation, social status and political affiliation;
 - 5.14 Respect the patient's right, to accept or reject advice

- 5.15 Respect patients' rights to privacy, and maintain confidentiality of information;
- 5.16 Recognise that one may decline to enter into a therapeutic relationship where an alternative service provider is available, and the situation is not an emergencyone;
- 5.17 Recognise one's professional limitations and be prepared to refer as appropriate;
- 5.18 Ensure that the patient is aware of service fees wherever applicable;
- 5.19 Respect the rights of patients in decisions about their care and involve them and their families in planning care, where appropriate;
- 5.20 Respect the patient's choice and right to refuse or choose their treatment;
- 5.21 Obtain informed consent to give treatment;
- 5.22 Treat those in his/her care with respect anddignity;
- 5.23 Ensure security of storage, access and utilization of patient information;
- 5.24 Explain the side effects and risks of potential hazardous drugs when administered;
- 5.25 Explain to the patient the likelihood of loss or impairment of some function following interventional procedure;
- 5.26 Be very careful to prevent the occurrence of foetal malformation while prescribing drugs to a pregnant or lactating woman and provide counselling accordingly;
- 5.27 Explain to the patient regarding the techniques used, pathological investigations required and also document the same clearly, precisely andaccurately;
- 5.28 Communicate effectively with patients, caregivers and other professionals; and

- 5.29 Exercise due sensitivity and subtleness while disclosing critical or grave condition or death of the patient to the patient or relatives as the case may be.
6. Notwithstanding anything provided in Section 5 (o), the medical and health professional may divulge patient information under the following circumstance:
 - 6.1 When there is a serious risk to the patient, another person or society at large;
 - 6.2 When the information is required by Court of Law/competent authority;
 - 6.3 When the patient consents for the same; and
 - 6.4 When the disclosure of information is necessary in the interest of the security of the state, the maintenance of law and order.

THE DYING PATIENT

7. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 7.1 Remember the obligation to preserve life at all times;
 - 7.2 Ensure that death occurs with dignity and comfort where death is deemed to be imminent and where curative or life-prolonging treatment appears to be futile;
 - 7.3 Respect the patient's autonomy regarding the management of their medical condition including the refusal of treatment;
 - 7.4 Respect the right of a severely and terminally ill patient to receive treatment for pain and suffering, even when such therapy may shorten a patient's life; and
 - 7.5 Recognise the need for physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support for the patient, the family and other carers not only during the life of the patient, but also after their death.

CLINICAL RESEARCH

8. Every medical and health professional conducting research shall obtain prior ethical clearance from appropriate boards and/ or any other research board abide by Regulation and Guidelines framed by such Board.
 - 8.1 Medical and health professionals facilitating research shall refrain from using coercion or unconscionable inducements as a means of obtaining consent/ taking part in the study.

CLINICAL TEACHING

9. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 9.1 Honour one's obligation to pass on one's professional knowledge and skills to colleagues and students;
 - 9.2 Ensure that patients are informed and have consented to participate in clinical teaching prior to commencement of the activity;
 - 9.3 Respect the patient's right to refuse or withdraw from participating in clinical teaching at any time without compromising the nature of treatment and care;
 - 9.4 Refrain from exploiting students or colleagues under one's supervision in anyway;
 - 9.5 Create and nurture a collegial environment in which students and trainees are valued and respected; and
 - 9.6 Foster student and trainee professional growth, lifelong learning, and ethical behaviour.

TRANSPLANTATION

10. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 10.1 Recognize that a potential donor is entitled to the same standard of care as any other patient;
 - 10.2 Inform the donor/family the purpose and the possible risk of organ transplant;
 - 10.3 Exercise sensitivity and compassion when discussing the option to donate organs with the potential donor and family;
 - 10.4 Refrain from using coercion when obtaining consent to all organ donations;
 - 10.5 Explain brain death to potential donor families and the need for continued artificial organ support to enable subsequent organ transplantation;
 - 10.6 Ensure that the determination of the death of any donor is made by service providers who are neither involved with the transplant procedure nor caring for the proposed recipient;
 - 10.7 Ensure that the donor, recipient and their families are given the opportunity to receive counselling and support; and
 - 10.8 Not indulge in any commercial affairs involving human organs.
 - 10.9 Comply the human organ donation policy and relevant law

CHAPTER III - DUTIES TOWARDS THE PROFESSION

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

11. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 11.1 Build a professional reputation based on integrity, trust, honesty and competency
 - 11.2 Behave in the way that one's personal conduct does not affect one's own and others professional reputation;
 - 11.3 Respect and acknowledge the expertise of other health professionals and refrain from making disparaging remarks about professional colleague;
 - 11.4 Report suspected unethical or unprofessional conduct by a colleague to the Bhutan Medical and Health Council or any other relevant peer review body;
 - 11.5 Respect the patient's right to complain and assist them in resolving the issue when a patient alleges unethical or unprofessional conduct by another medical and health professional;
 - 11.6 Refrain from abuse of one's position and respect and follow the hospital policy on patient's rights;
 - 11.7 Keep abreast codes of practice and legal responsibilities;
 - 11.8 Commit to lifelong learning and maintain and develop professional knowledge, skills and competence for excellence in practice;
 - 11.9 Refrain from performing and participating in procedures that is unethical, illegal, or may be detrimental to patients well-being;
 - 11.10 Be open and honest in all dealings
 - 11.11 Practice in a safe, competent, accountable and responsible manner during the provision of services;
 - 11.12 Refrain from soliciting or accepting bribes from patients or their relatives which may influence a decision;

- 11.13 Use judgment regarding individual competence when accepting or delegating responsibility;
- 11.14 Practise the system of medicine in which he/she is qualified and authorized to do so;
- 11.15 Share professional knowledge and skills with colleagues;
- 11.16 Commit to continuous quality improvement;
- 11.17 Take precautions to safely perform duties and protect patients, attendants and co-workers and
- 11.18 Be responsible to maintain psychological and physical well-being as it may affect one's professionalability.

ADVERTISING

- 12. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 12.1 Refrain from making any misleading claims for special knowledge or skill in order to entice patients or to gain undue publicity;
 - 12.2 Confine advertising of professional services to the presentation of information reasonably needed by general public or colleague to make an informed decision about the availability and appropriateness of medical services;
 - 12.3 Make sure that any announcement or advertisement directed towards patients or colleagues is demonstrably true in all respects;
 - 12.4 Refrain from endorsing therapeutic goods in public advertising;
 - 12.5 Exercise caution in endorsing non-therapeutic goods in public advertising;
 - 12.6 Refrain from public association with products that clearly affect health adversely;and

REFERRAL TO COLLEAGUES

13. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 13.1 Consult with an appropriate professional colleague acceptable to the patient if diagnosis or treatment is difficult or obscure, or in response to a reasonable request by the patient;
 - 13.2 Make available all relevant information and documents of the patient while referring a patient to colleague;
 - 13.3 Submit detailed report of the findings and recommendations to the referring service provider when an opinion has been requested; and
 - 13.4 Make the referral of the patient only after discussion with the patient's treating physician except in an emergency situation when a consultant physician finds a condition which requires referral of the patient to a consultant in another field.

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE

14. In order to provide high quality healthcare every medical and health professional shall:
 - 14.1 Safeguard clinical independence and professional integrity from increased demands from society, third parties, individual patients and government;
 - 14.2 Refrain from habitual solicitation and receiving of gifts in any form from patients or their relatives;
 - 14.3 Refrain from entering into any contract with a colleague or organisation which may conflict with professional integrity, clinical independence or primary obligation to the patient;
 - 14.4 Recognise the right to refuse to carry out services which are imposed for either administrative reasons

- or for financial gain where such services are professionally unethical or against moral convictions or not in the best interest of the patient; and
- 14.5 Continue lifelong self-education to improve one's standard of medical care.

CHAPTER IV – DUTIES TOWARDS THE SOCIETY

15. Every medical and health professional shall:
 - 15.1 Provide healthcare-related volunteer service, where necessary;
 - 15.2 Endeavour to improve the community access to standards and quality healthcare services;
 - 15.3 Notify appropriate authority on outbreak of infectious diseases or any other notifiable diseases/ conditions;
 - 15.4 Participate in promoting health and safety of the public, health education and legislation affecting the health of the community;
 - 15.5 Provide expert evidence or testimony in the Court of Law or tribunal;
 - 15.6 Provide generally held opinions of the profession in a form that is readily understood when sharingscientific information to the public;
 - 15.7 Refrain from condoning or participation in the practice of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading procedures;
 - 15.8 Disclose information even if it is obtained in confidence from patients when it is necessary to do so in the interest of the security of the state, the maintenance of law and order and infectious disease of public health importance or communicable diseases;
 - 15.9 Not indulge in pretences, forgery, fraud, theft, counterfeiting, indecent behaviour or assault and/or illegal activities;
 - 15.10 Not undertake any professional or any other activities that would endanger the spiritual, cultural and social value of the nation;

- 15.11 Render competent and considerate professional management to provide the best possible care;
- 15.12 Recognize his/her important role in educating the public but should use due caution in divulging discoveries or new techniques or treatment through non-professional channels;
- 15.13 Give emergency care as a humanitarian duty unless he/she is assured that others are willing and able to give such care;
- 15.14 Ensure that the use of technology and scientific advances are compatible with the safety, dignity and the rights of the people;
- 15.15 Not conduct sex determination test of baby; and
- 15.16 Not spread false and/or defamatory information.

