

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Adopted by Dartmouth Medical School, The Dartmouth-Hitchcock Clinic and Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital

1999 Revision

Preface

The Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) and its component institutions are committed to excellence in: 1) patient care; 2) education and training of medical students, graduate students, house officers, nurses, and other health professionals; 3) continuing education of staff members; and 4) research. To further the goal of excellence, all professionals at DHMC are expected to adhere to the Code of Professional Conduct in their interactions with patients, colleagues, other health professionals, students, other trainees, and the public.

The Code of Professional Conduct is a series of principles and their subsidiary rules that govern professional interactions. The Code consists of two complementary sections: professional obligations and professional ideals. "Obligations" refer to *necessary* professional behaviors that are required by the ethical foundation of medical practice, teaching, learning, and research. "Ideals" refer to *desirable* professional behaviors that professionals at all levels should attempt to acquire because they enhance professional excellence.

The Code applies to all professionals at DHMC involved in the clinical, teaching, research, and administrative activities of the Center. Because of its broad reach, certain portions of the Code will be more directly applicable to some disciplines than to others. For example, the clinical portions apply to medical students, physicians, nurses, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, and all other professionals engaged in patient care. Similarly, those portions pertaining to teaching and research apply to all professionals engaged in teaching and research regardless of discipline or level of training. The portions pertaining to students apply to trainees at all levels. The general portions of the Code which discuss confidentiality, conflicts of interest, interpersonal relations, and the professional ideals apply to all DHMC professionals.

Failure to meet the professional obligations described below represents a violation of the DHMC Code of Professional Conduct. Items marked with an asterisk indicate behaviors that also may violate federal or state laws. Alleged infractions of the professional obligations of the Code will be dealt with by the appropriate DHMC disciplinary committees and processes. Alleged failure to meet the professional ideals, although less serious, also may be grounds for disciplinary review.

A. *Professional Obligations*

1. **Respect for Persons**

- Treat patients, colleagues, other health professionals, students, and teachers with the same degree of respect you would wish them to show you.
- Treat patients with kindness, gentleness, and dignity.
- Respect the privacy and modesty of patients.
- Do not use offensive language, verbally or in writing, when referring to patients or their illnesses.
- Do not harass others physically, verbally, psychologically, or sexually. *
- Do not discriminate on the basis of sex, religion, race, disability, age, or sexual orientation. *

2. Respect for Patient Confidentiality

- Do not share the medical or personal details of a patient with anyone except those health care professionals integral to the well being of the patient or within the context of an educational endeavor. *
- Do not discuss patients or their illnesses in public places where the conversation may be overheard.
- Do not publicly identify patients, in spoken words or in writing, without adequate justification.
- Do not invite or permit unauthorized persons into patient care areas of the institution.
- Do not share your confidential Clinic Information System or VA computer system passwords with unauthorized persons.
- Do not look up confidential data on patients without a professional "need to know." *
- Do not misuse electronic mail.

3. Honesty, Integrity

- Be truthful in verbal and in written communications.
- Acknowledge your errors of omission and commission to colleagues and patients.
- Protect the integrity of clinical decision making, regardless of how the medical center shares financial risk with or compensates its leaders, managers, and clinical staff.
- Do not knowingly mislead others.
- Do not cheat, plagiarize, or otherwise act dishonestly.
- Do not abuse special privileges, e.g., making unauthorized long-distance telephone calls.

4. Responsibility for Patient Care

- Obtain the patient's informed consent for diagnostic tests or therapies.
- Assume 24-hour responsibility for the patients under your care; when off duty, or on vacation, assure that your patients are adequately cared for by another practitioner.
- Follow up on ordered laboratory tests and complete patient record documentation conscientiously.
- Coordinate with your team the timing of information sharing with patients and their families to present a coherent and consistent treatment plan.
- Charge patients or their insurers only for clinical services provided or supervised. *
- Do not abuse alcohol or drugs that could diminish the quality of patient care or academic performance.
- Do not have romantic or sexual relationships with patients; if such a relationship seems to be developing, seek guidance and terminate the professional relationship. *

5. Awareness of Limitations, Professional Growth

- Be aware of your personal limitations and deficiencies in knowledge and abilities and know when and whom to ask for supervision, assistance, or consultation.
- Know when and for whom to provide appropriate supervision.
- Students and other trainees should have all patient workups and orders countersigned by the appropriate supervisor.
- Avoid patient involvement when you are ill, distraught, or overcome with personal problems.
- Do not engage in unsupervised involvement in areas or situations where you are not adequately trained.

6. Deportment as a Professional

- Clearly identify yourself and your professional level to patients and staff; wear your name tag when in patient areas.
- Dress in a neat, clean, professionally appropriate manner.
- Maintain a professional composure despite the stresses of fatigue, professional pressures, or personal problems.
- Do not introduce medical students as "doctor" or allow yourself as a medical student to be introduced as "doctor."
- Do not write offensive or judgmental comments in patients' charts.
- Do not criticize the medical decisions of colleagues in the presence of patients.
- Avoid the use of first names without permission in addressing adult patients.

7. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

- Resolve all clinical conflicts of interest in favor of the patient.
- Do not accept non-educational gifts of value from drug companies or medical equipment vendors or suppliers.
- Do not participate in incentive programs, especially when this involves prescribing drugs made by the company.
- Do not refer patients to laboratories or other agencies in which you have a direct financial stake. *
- Do not accept a "kickback" for any patient referral. *

8. Responsibility for Peer Behavior

- Take the initiative to identify and help rehabilitate impaired students, physicians, nurses, and other employees with the assistance of the DMS Student Needs and Assistance Program, the DHMC Physicians Health Committee, the MHMH and HC Employee Assistance Program, or the employee's supervisor.
- Report serious breaches of the Code of Professional Conduct to the appropriate person.
- Indicate disapproval or seek appropriate intervention if you observe less serious breaches.

9. Respect for Personal Ethics

- You are not required to perform procedures (e.g., elective abortions, termination of medical treatment) that you, personally, believe are unethical, illegal, or may be detrimental to patients.
- You have an obligation, however, to inform patients and their families of available treatment options that are consistent with acceptable standards of medical and nursing care.
- To avoid abandoning such patients, you have an obligation to assist in making a referral to another competent practitioner willing to care for the patient.

10. Respect for Property and Laws

- Adhere to the regulations and policies of Dartmouth College, DHMC, and its component institutions, e.g., policies governing fire safety, hazardous waste disposal, and universal precautions.
- Adhere to local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- Do not misappropriate, destroy, damage, or misuse property of DHMC or its component institutions. *

11. Integrity in Research

- Report research results honestly in scientific and scholarly presentations and publications.
- When publishing and presenting reports, give proper credit and responsibility to colleagues and others who participated in the research.
- Report research findings to the public and press honestly and without exaggeration.
- Avoid potential conflicts of interest in research; disclose funding sources, company ownership, and other potential conflicts of interest in written and spoken research presentations.
- Adhere to the institutional regulations that govern research using human subjects and animals.

B. Professional Ideals

1. Clinical Virtues

- Attempt to cultivate and practice clinical virtues, such as caring, empathy, and compassion.

2. Conscientiousness

- Fulfill your professional responsibilities with conscientiousness.
- Notify the responsible supervisor if something interferes with your ability to perform clinical tasks effectively.
- Learn from experience and grow from the knowledge gained from errors to avoid repeating them.
- Dedicate yourself to lifelong learning and self-improvement by implementing a personal program of continuing education and continuous quality improvement.
- Students and trainees should complete all assignments accurately, thoroughly, legibly, and in a timely manner.

- Students and trainees should attend scheduled classes, laboratories, seminars, and conferences except for justified absences.

3. Collegiality

- Cooperate with other members of the health care team in clinical activities and with other members of the research team in research activities.
- Teach others at all levels of education and training.
- Be generous with your time to answer questions from trainees, patients, and patients' family members.
- Shoulder a fair share of the institutional administrative burden.
- Adopt a spirit of volunteerism and altruism in teaching and patient care tasks.
- Use communal resources (equipment, supplies, and funds) responsibly and equitably.

4. Personal Health

- Develop a life style of dietary habits, recreation, disease prevention, exercise, and outside interests to optimize physical and emotional health and enhance professional performance.

5. Objectivity

- Avoid providing professional care to members of your family or to persons with whom you have a romantic relationship.

6. Responsibility to Society

- Avoid unnecessary patient or societal health care monetary expenditures.
- Provide services to all patients regardless of their ability to pay.

* Behaviors that also may violate federal or state laws.