



Responsibilities of doctors in management and governance

Key points about responsibilities of doctors in management and governance

If you are in a management or governance role, you have a duty to your colleagues, your workplace, and the wider community. The interests and safety of patients must be your first concern.

If you make decisions about resource allocation or services in an area outside your experience or expertise, or there are disagreements about whose needs should be prioritised, you should seek advice from colleagues with the relevant expertise.

If you are responsible for managing colleagues, be prepared to discuss their problems about professional practice and development in a constructive manner. Ensure that your staff know how to raise concerns about their workplace or about individuals, and that appropriate action is taken.

As a doctor with management or governance responsibilities, our standards on professional conduct apply to you in that role.

Introduction

- 1 The Medical Council of New Zealand (Council) supports the involvement of doctors in management, governance, and clinical leadership roles.
- 2 This statement sets out our expectation of doctors who have leadership or management responsibilities.
- 3 This statement may be used by Council, the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, and the Health and Disability Commissioner as a standard by which to assess your conduct as a doctor.

Responsibilities of medical managers and board members

- 4 When you act as a manager or board member, you have a duty to your colleagues, your workplace, and the wider community. The interests and safety of patients must always be your first concern.
- 5 Where resources are limited you should participate in discussions and decisions about the allocation of these resources, considering the best interests of patients and where possible, using evidence and best practice to form a view.
- 6 When making decisions about resource allocation or services in an area outside of your experience or expertise, or where there are disagreements about the needs of an individual patient and those of a wider population, you should seek the advice of colleagues who have relevant training and knowledge.

- 7 You should be aware of your organisation's review process. If you believe that a management or governance decision puts patients at risk of serious harm, you must make your objections known. If you believe there has been serious wrongdoing and you are not satisfied this has been rectified, you have the option of raising the matter with the Director-General of Health, the Health and Disability Commissioner, or Council. You can make a protected disclosure under the Protected Disclosures Act 2000. If necessary, you can consult a defence body or professional association to support you.
- 8 If you are elected or appointed to serve on a District Health Board (DHB), advisory committee, or a board of a primary care group then you must continue to adhere to Council's standards on professional conduct when you are in that role.

Managing and employing colleagues

- 9 If you are responsible for managing colleagues, you must be prepared to constructively and sympathetically discuss any problems they face in their professional practice and development. Council can help when issues arise involving competence or health. There is a mandatory requirement to report to the Registrar if a doctor is not able to perform the functions required to practise medicine because of a mental or physical condition¹.
- 10 You should ensure your staff know how to raise concerns about the workplace, or about individuals, and that appropriate action is taken when a concern is raised.
- 11 If a concern has been raised by a doctor about the competence of a colleague, you should protect the reporting doctor from harmful criticisms or actions.
- 12 If there are grounds for concern and patient care is being compromised, you must take prompt action to protect patients².

June 2021

This refreshes the March 2011 statement. It is scheduled for full review by July 2025. Legislative changes may make this statement obsolete before this review date.

¹ Section 45, Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

² Doctors should follow the guidance of the Council and Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 if they have good reason to believe a colleague's conduct, performance or health may be putting patients at risk.