

DRAFT Professional Standards for Physician Associates

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Introduction

Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa | Medical Council of New Zealand is responsible for protecting the health and safety of the public by ensuring that physician associates (PAs) are competent and fit to practise in Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of meeting this obligation, the Council has set professional standards (standards) that must be observed by all PAs. These standards are made by the Council under s 118(1)(i) of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

The standards may be used by the Council, Health and Disability Commissioner, Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, Ministry of Health, employers, and other agencies to evaluate a PA's conduct in their professional capacity.

The standards work together and apply to all areas of PA practice. They put patient interests first and support public health and safety by setting out the minimum requirements for safe practice, and outlining the expectations for communication, consent, collaboration, and professional behaviour.

- **Patient care** requires PAs to put patient interests first. This includes taking a patient-centred approach, acting in patients' best interests, respecting patient dignity, safety, culture, and beliefs, and promoting the health and wellbeing of patients and the public.
- **Safe practice** requires PAs to practise within the limits of their competence, defined clinical responsibilities and under supervision, make sound clinical decisions, and take steps to prevent harm. This includes responding appropriately to medical emergencies, and maintaining fitness to practise by seeking own independent health care when needed.
- **Good communication and informed consent** require PAs to communicate clearly with patients, support informed decision-making, and ensure consent is obtained and maintained. This includes maintaining accurate and up to date documentation, and communicating effectively with patients so they understand their care and can make informed choices.
- **Collaboration** requires PAs to work respectfully and effectively as part of the health care team. This includes communicating clearly to support safe and coordinated care, and ensure a safe transfer and handover of care.
- **Professionalism** requires PAs to act with integrity, maintain public trust, and be accountable for their professional conduct. This includes being transparent about matters that may affect their practice, meeting legal and professional obligations, and taking responsibility for ongoing professional development.

In this document, 'you must' is used to specify the professional standards that PAs are required to meet. These standards are numbered and are referred to in this document for example, as standard 1.a.

Guidance is also included in italicised bullets. The guidance aims to support PAs understand and apply the standards.

The standards are not an exhaustive list of a PA's responsibilities, and do not cover every situation that may be encountered in practice. PAs are expected to use their professional judgement to apply the standards in practice and must be able to justify their behaviour, decisions, and actions if necessary. Other legislation and regulations may be relevant to care and treatment decisions, and additional standards or guidance may apply to specific areas of practice.

DRAFT Professional Standards for Physician Associates * *with Guidance*

1. Patient care

You must:

- a. Make the care of patients your first consideration.
 - *Take a whole-person approach to care, appropriate to the patient and their family and/or whānau.*
- b. Maintain and support the patient's safety, wellbeing, privacy, and dignity.
 - *Act promptly if you think the patient's safety, wellbeing, privacy, or dignity may be compromised.*
 - *Allow patients to have a support person present if they choose, and offer the option of a chaperone during examinations or procedures.*
- c. Respect patients' rights, values, beliefs, cultures, and perspectives.
 - *Support patients' preferences for observing their beliefs and cultural practices in a health care setting.*
 - *Work in partnership with patients and communities.*
- d. Protect and promote the health of patients and the public.
 - *Make good use of the resources available to you, taking account of your responsibilities to the wider population and health system limitations.*
- e. Put the interests of patients ahead of your own personal, financial or other gain.

2. Safe practice

You must:

- a. Work within your education and competence, and the defined clinical responsibilities assigned by your employer through credentialing.
 - *Recognise the limits of your knowledge and skills.*

- *Recognise when to seek the assistance and input of a doctor, and when to refer to another health practitioner.*
 - *Actively participate in credentialing processes with your employer.*
 - *Raise any concerns or issues you may have about your clinical responsibilities.*
- b. Always comply with your supervision requirements.
- *Only practise when you have an onsite supervising doctor available to you.*
- c. Provide care that is clinically justified and based on the best available evidence.
- d. Practise in a way that is culturally safe for all patients and communities.
- *Involve patients in making decisions about their care.*
 - *Avoid stereotyping or making assumptions about others based on your own experiences, culture or beliefs.*
 - *Adjust your practice as needed to ensure patients feel culturally safe under your care.*
- e. Always maintain appropriate professional boundaries with your patients.
- *Be aware that empathy and connection must support the patient's needs, rather than your own needs.*
 - *You should not treat yourself, family and/or whānau, or those close to you, except in a medical emergency.*
- f. Never develop a sexual or intimate emotional relationship with a patient.
- *Avoid developing a sexual or intimate emotional relationship with someone close to the patient, or a former patient.*
- g. Ensure you are fit to practise by seeking independent health advice and treatment when required.
- *Register with a primary care provider for your own health needs and seek timely care when needed.*
- h. Provide appropriate assistance in a medical emergency, applying your professional knowledge and skill.
- *If you do not assist in a medical emergency, you should be able to justify your decision*

3. Good communication and informed consent

You must:

- a. Communicate clearly and effectively, appropriate to the needs of the patient and their family and/or whānau, respecting patient privacy and confidentiality.
- b. Clearly identify yourself as a physician associate and ensure that patients and the public understand your role.
- *Use the title 'Physician Associate' in a clinical setting, even if you have a doctorate.*
 - *When describing or advertising yourself or your services, ensure you:*
 - *avoid words or language that could cause confusion about your qualifications, profession, skills, or experience*
 - *only refer to the qualifications that are recorded against your name on the Physician Associate Register.*
- c. Ensure patients are given the information they need to make informed decisions about their care.
- *Provide information to patients yourself or confirm that the information has been provided by your supervising doctor.*

- *Answer the patient's questions to the best of your ability.*
- d. Ensure informed consent is obtained prior to treating the patient, and that consent is maintained as you care for the patient.
- *Respect the patient's preferences, concerns, and autonomy.*
 - *Provide patients with alternative options.*
 - *Support the patient's right to:*
 - *be seen by a doctor or another health practitioner*
 - *decline treatment*
 - *decline involvement in education or research.*
 - *Seek advice if you have questions or concerns about a patient's capacity to consent to treatment.*
- e. Maintain clear, accurate, and up to date patient records, with relevant clinical information.
- *Complete records in real time, or as soon as possible afterwards.*

4. Collaboration

You must:

- a. Work respectfully and collaboratively with other members of the health care team in ways that best serve patients' interests and enhance coordination of patient care.
- *Recognise the knowledge and complementary skills of other members of the health care team as part of patient-centred care.*
 - *Inform patients if their information is shared with others involved in their care.*
 - *Ensure you have processes for safe handover and transfer of patient care.*
 - *Ensure there is a process for identifying and following up on results and referrals.*
 - *You should not tolerate bullying, harassment, or discrimination against other health professionals or members of the health care team.*
 - *Act promptly to protect patients where you have good reason to believe another health practitioner's conduct, performance, or health poses a risk of harm.*

5. Professionalism

You must:

- a. Always be respectful and act with honesty and integrity in your professional capacity.
- b. Ensure that trust and confidence in the profession is not compromised by your conduct.
- c. Be familiar with, and meet your, professional and legal obligations.
- d. Manage conflicts of interest, and not allow personal, financial, or other interests to compromise patient care.
- e. Uphold a patient's right to complain.
- *Allow patients the opportunity to give feedback about their care.*
 - *Ensure you are aware of complaints processes in your workplace.*
- f. Maintain and develop your knowledge and skills through a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development.
- g. Tell the Council, and any person or organisation that has a reasonable expectation to know, about any matter (in New Zealand or overseas) that may affect your practice.

- *You should tell the Council if:*
 - *you have been charged with or found guilty of a criminal offence*
 - *you have been suspended or dismissed from duties by your employer*
 - *you have resigned for reasons relating to your competence, conduct, or health*
 - *a professional body or regulator has made an adverse finding about you or your fitness to practise.*
 - *Employers, and others you work with will generally need to be informed if your ability to practise, or the scope of your work, is impacted by conditions or suspension.*
 - *Patients may need to be informed of any matters that could affect their treatment or ongoing care with you.*
- h. Advise the Council if a physical or mental condition may affect your practice, judgement, or performance.
- *You should not rely on your own assessment of the risk your condition may pose to patients.*
- i. Fully cooperate with any formal investigation, inquiry, or inquest.
- *Be honest, accurate, and objective when providing information.*
 - *Avoid any actions that could obstruct or hinder investigation processes or influence notifiers, complainants or witnesses.*