



Statement on cosmetic procedures

Purpose of this statement

01 This statement outlines the standards expected of doctors who perform cosmetic procedures.¹ The statement may be used by the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, the Council and the Health and Disability Commissioner as a standard by which your conduct is measured.

Definition

02 Council has defined “cosmetic procedures” as follows:

“Operations and other procedures that revise or change the appearance, colour, texture, structure or position of normal bodily features with the sole intention of improving the patient’s appearance or self esteem.”²

Potential for conflicts

03 Providing a cosmetic procedure does not improve a patient’s physical health and it may be difficult to determine whether the procedure is in the patient’s best interests.

04 You must therefore take great care to ensure that patients who wish to undergo a cosmetic procedure receive the appropriate information, make an informed choice, give their consent and are free from exploitation.

05 The clinical relationship between a doctor performing a cosmetic procedure and a patient may also be complicated by the consumer’s heightened expectations of the results that can be achieved and the provider’s opportunities for commercial advantage. You must recognise these conflicts and have a duty not to allow them to cloud your professional judgement.

06 Do not abuse your patient’s trust. The investigations or procedure you provide or arrange must be made on the assessment you and the patient make of their needs and priorities, and on your clinical judgement about the likely effectiveness of the intervention.

07 Do not make a patient feel ashamed or self-conscious because of their physical appearance. Your first concern must always be the patient, and that may require advising him or her that the requested intervention is not appropriate.

Expectation of training, skill and expertise

08 *Good medical practice* outlines the duties and responsibilities of a doctor registered with the Medical Council. This states that “In providing care you must recognise and work within the limits of your competence.”³

09 A cosmetic procedure must therefore only be provided if you have the necessary training, expertise and experience in the particular procedure being performed and to deal with all routine aspects of care and any likely complications.

10 You are responsible for ensuring that you have the necessary training, expertise and experience to perform a particular cosmetic procedure with reasonable care and skill.⁴

¹ Patients are advised that this statement only addresses the standard of care expected of doctors. If you seek care from a health practitioner who is not a doctor then you should obtain advice from the relevant regulatory or professional body.

² The statement does not cover procedures which improve a patient’s physical health and safety other than by improving their appearance and self-esteem. This includes gender reassignment procedures, which the World Professional Association of Transgender’s Health Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders note are “medically necessary and are not cosmetic in any meaningful sense”. Doctors providing care to transgender patients should refer to the Ministry of Health’s guidelines on *Gender reassignment health services for Trans people in New Zealand*.

³ Page 6. *Good medical practice*. Medical Council of New Zealand. October 2008.

⁴ If you do not comply with this requirement you may be subject to a competence review by the Council if there is reason to believe that your competence may be deficient.

The categorisation system

11 Cosmetic procedures vary in the level of risk and complexity associated with them. To assist it in setting standards the Council has classified different procedures in accordance with the types of providers involved, the type of facility in which they are performed and the level of risk to the consumer:

Category 1

A surgical procedure that involves cutting beneath the skin, such as breast augmentation, breast reduction, rhinoplasty, surgical face lifts, liposuction and otoplasty.

Most commonly performed in a day procedure centre or hospital, with an anaesthetist present.

May be performed by a doctor registered in a relevant surgical scope of practice⁵, who has the necessary training, expertise and experience in the procedure being performed; and whose competence in the procedure has been independently accredited.⁶

Category 1 procedures which involve cutting the skin and into subcutaneous fat may also be performed by a dermatologist whose competence in the procedure has been accredited by the New Zealand Dermatological Society; and who has the necessary training, expertise and experience in the procedure being performed.

A doctor registered in a vocational scope of general practice may perform tumescent liposuction if he or she has met the requirements of the Council's *Interim policy for doctors registered in a general scope or a vocational scope of general practice who wish to perform tumescent liposuction*.

A doctor who is not registered in a vocational scope of practice may only perform category 1 procedures if he or she is enrolled in a relevant vocational training programme.⁷ A doctor who is not registered in a vocational scope of practice and who wishes to perform tumescent liposuction must also meet the requirements of the Council's *Interim policy for doctors registered in a general scope or a vocational scope of general practice who wish to perform tumescent liposuction*.

Category 2

A non-surgical procedure (although in some cases it may involve piercing the skin), such as non-surgical cosmetic varicose vein treatment, laser skin treatments, use of CO2 lasers to cut the skin, mole removal for purposes of appearance, laser hair removal, dermabrasion, chemical peels, injections, microsclerotherapy and hair replacement therapy.

Most commonly performed in day procedure centres or doctors' clinics with or without an anaesthetist.

May be performed by a doctor registered in a vocational scope of practice; whose competence in the procedure has been accredited by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (via the New Zealand College of Appearance Medicine), the New Zealand Dermatological Society or the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons; and who has the necessary training, expertise and experience in the procedure being performed.

A doctor who is not registered in an appropriate vocational scope of practice and/or whose training has not been accredited by an appropriate body may also perform a category 2 procedure if he or she is in a collegial relationship with a vocationally registered doctor whose training has been accredited and that colleague is satisfied that the doctor's training is appropriate and he or she is competent to perform the procedure.

Advertising and promotion⁸

12 Advertising and promotional material must not glamorise products and services or foster unrealistic expectations.

13 Advertisements must contain truthful and balanced representations and claims must be valid, evidence-based and substantiated. You should not make direct comparisons between the quality of your services and the quality of services your colleagues provide.

14 You must not overstate your qualifications. Patients can find medical titles misleading and to reduce confusion you should avoid using titles such as "specialist" that refer to an area of expertise, unless you are registered with the Council in an appropriate vocational scope.⁹

⁵ For this purpose, the doctor must hold a postgraduate surgical qualification recognised by the Council as allowing registration within a relevant surgical vocational scope of practice.

⁶ Independent accreditation may occur through a branch advisory body training programme or through a credentialing process.

⁷ For the purpose of performing tumescent liposuction, this includes the vocational training programme for general practice.

⁸ This section contains extracts from the Council's *Statement on advertising*. Refer to that document for more comprehensive advice on Council's expectations.

⁹ Vocationally registered general practitioners who are also Fellows of the New Zealand College of Appearance Medicine should use a title such as "general practitioner with a special interest in appearance medicine".

Obtaining consent

- 15 Because performing elective procedures may involve a conflict of interest, obtaining the patient's informed consent is essential. The informed consent process should start at the initial consultation and must involve a two way communication process which results in the patient having sufficient information to make a fully informed choice about whether to undergo the procedure.
- 16 Selection of patients for category 1 cosmetic procedures must start with an effective assessment of the patient's motivation for seeking treatment. Steps should also be taken to ensure that the patient has realistic expectations and that any preconceived ideas based on advertising and media sources have been ascertained and addressed. You should be very cautious before agreeing to perform a procedure on:
 - a. A patient experiencing a current episode of mental illness or who has a long-standing persistent body dysmorphic or personality disorder.
 - b. A patient who has had multiple cosmetic procedures and is dissatisfied each time.
 - c. A patient who appears indecisive.
 - d. A patient who believes a cosmetic procedure is the solution to all of their problems.
 - e. A patient who has not carefully and thoroughly considered the implications of undergoing the procedure.
- 17 There must be an opportunity for a patient to be referred for psychological evaluation if you have concerns about their motivation. Such doubts might arise, for example, if you suspect the patient has a body dysmorphic disorder or a personality disorder. Onsite counselling services are not necessarily required, but you must know how to access such services. This requirement is especially relevant when category 1 procedures are being provided.
- 18 If you are asked to perform a cosmetic procedure on a minor you should act with great caution. In such circumstances you must first assess the child's competency and form an opinion on whether he or she is able to make an informed choice and give informed consent. Generally, a competent child is one who is able to understand the nature, purpose and possible consequences of the proposed procedure, as well as the consequences of not undergoing the procedure.¹⁰
- 19 A patient's informed written consent should be obtained at a pre-procedure consultation within a reasonable time period before the day of the procedure and consent must be reconfirmed on the day the procedure occurs. Obtaining informed consent is the responsibility of the doctor treating the patient.
- 20 There must be a period of reflection of at least seven days between any initial consultation and the performance of a category 1 cosmetic procedure.
- 21 At the time of the initial consultation for a category 1 procedure, provide patients with written information in lay language which includes:
 - Realistic information about what is involved with the procedure.
 - The range of possible outcomes (including worst case scenarios).
 - The risks associated with the procedure.
 - Recovery times and requirements.
 - Other options for addressing their concerns, including clinically appropriate treatments that you do not provide but which are offered by other practitioners and non-treatment.
 - The patient's rights as a consumer.
 - How to make a complaint if something goes wrong.
 - Information about your qualifications and experience.
- 22 Where specific and recognised ethical standards for obtaining informed consent exist, you must follow these.

¹⁰ Section 36 of the Care of Children Act 2004 states that children over the age of 16 years can give consent as if they are adults. Section 36 does not automatically prohibit persons under 16 years from consenting to medical procedures. In the absence of clear legislative direction it is likely that the principles set out in **Gillick**, namely that parental consent is not always necessary for medical procedures for persons under 16 years, will be followed by NZ courts. Such an approach is also consistent with the requirements of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights. Refer to the Council's statement on *Information, choice of treatment and informed consent* for more information.

23 Following any category 1 procedure, provide patients with written information in lay language which tells them:

- How to contact you if complications arise.
- Details of who they can contact if you are not available.
- The usual range of post-operative symptoms.
- Where to go if they experience unusual pain or symptoms.
- Appropriate instructions for medication and self care.
- Details of the dates for follow up visits.

Providing care

24 Good clinical care includes fully assessing the patient's condition, taking account of the patient's history and his or her views and examining the patient as appropriate.¹¹

25 The operating doctor is responsible for all aspects of preoperative, operative and post operative care. Delegation of care must be appropriate and arranged in advance of any procedure.

26 Carry out all surgical procedures in facilities where there are adequate and appropriate backup services available to address any foreseeable operative complications.

27 You should seek the patient's permission to keep their general practitioner informed.

28 Provide appropriate follow up. At a minimum follow up for a category 1 procedure requires that you be available personally for at least two weeks post procedure, or to have a formal arrangement with another suitably qualified practitioner who has full access to the patient's history. Inform patients if you intend to hand over care to another practitioner.

Audit and review

29 If you perform cosmetic procedures you must participate in clinical audit or reporting on a number of clinical indicators. Ideally this should occur annually and should contribute towards the mandatory requirements for continuing professional development and recertification.

Related Council statements and resources

- Information, choice of treatment and informed consent (March 2011).
- Statement on advertising (August 2010).
- Interim policy for doctors registered in a vocational scope of general practice who wish to perform tumescent liposuction (October 2011).

October 2011

This statement is scheduled for review by October 2016. Legislative changes may make the statement obsolete before this review date.

¹¹ Paragraph 2. *Good medical practice*.
