Professional Standards for Physician Associates

Introduction

Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa | Medical Council of New Zealand set these Professional Standards for Physician Associates 2026 (the standards) under section 118(1)(i) of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

The standards are secondary legislation for the purposes of the Legislation Act 2019 and apply equally to all areas of Physician Associate (PA) practice. All PAs registered in Aotearoa New Zealand are required to meet these standards. Failure to meet the standards could result in Council involvement and may impact on the PA's practice. The standards may be used to evaluate conduct by employers, the Health and Disability Commissioner, Ministry of Health, Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, and courts.

The standards 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.

The standards should be read in conjunction with other components of the regulatory framework for PAs, including scopes of practice and the supervision framework. 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. It is important that all PAs have an appropriate understanding of, and comply with, all laws and regulations that are relevant to PA practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

How to use this document

In this document, 'must' means a mandatory professional standard that PAs are required to follow. Each standard has a number (for example, Standard 1.a).

This document also includes guidance in italicised bullet points. The guidance helps those using the standards to understand their intent and how to apply them in practice. The guidance is not mandatory but should be taken into account when deciding how to meet the standards.

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.*
- *Involve patients in making decisions about their care.*

b. Put the interests of patients ahead of your own personal, financial or other gain, and declare and manage conflicts of interest.

- *Your personal beliefs, including political, religious and moral beliefs, should not affect your advice or treatment.*
- *Clinical decisions should be free from actual or perceived bias about an organisation, device, product, person or service.*

c. Maintain and support patients' safety, wellbeing, privacy, and dignity.

- *Act promptly if you think the patient's safety, wellbeing, privacy, or dignity may be compromised.*
- *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.*
- *Tell the Council, your supervisor(s), employer, and any person or organisation that has a reasonable expectation to know, about any matter (in Aotearoa 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, your supervisor(s), and others you work with will 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.*
- *You should not rely on your own assessment of the risk your condition may pose to patients.*

d. Respect patients' rights, values, beliefs, cultures, and perspectives.

- *Inform patients of their rights as health consumers and enable patients to exercise those rights.*
- *Advise patients that they can have a support person(s) present if they choose.*
- *Offer a chaperone for consultations where appropriate, such as during intimate physical examinations.*
- *Support patients' preferences for observing their beliefs and cultural practices in a health care setting.*

- *Work in partnership with patients and communities.*

e. 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.*

2. Safe practice

You must:

a. Work within your qualifications, training and experience, and the defined clinical responsibilities set by your employer through credentialling.
   - *Recognise the limits of your knowledge and skills.*
   - *Recognise when to seek the assistance and input of your supervising doctor, and do so in a timely manner.*
   - *Actively participate in credentialling processes with your employer or clinical lead.*
   - *Raise any concerns or issues you may have about your clinical responsibilities.*

b. Always comply with your supervision requirements, as set out in the Medical Council's supervision framework.

c. Provide care that is clinically justified and evidence-based.

d. Practise in a way that is culturally safe for all patients and communities.
   - *Identify and manage your own assumptions and biases, including how your own life experience, culture and beliefs may influence your interactions with others in your professional setting and impact on the advice and care you provide.*
   - *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 should 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 must be able to justify your decision.

3. Good communication and informed consent

You must:

a. Communicate clearly and effectively with patients and their family and/or whānau, in a way that meets their needs while respecting patient privacy and confidentiality.

b. Clearly identify yourself as a 'physician associate' in professional settings and tell patients (and/or their family/whānau/support person(s)) that you are not a medical doctor.

- *Recognise that the title 'Physician Associate' can be misunderstood, and that patients, family and/or whānau may think they are seeing a doctor.*
- *Ensure that patients and the public understand your role, and how it differs from other health practitioners' roles.*
- *Avoid words or language that could cause confusion about your profession, qualifications, 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 patients with information that is within your scope of practice.*
- *Where the information is outside of your scope of practice, provide patients with the option to consult with a doctor or another health practitioner.*

d. Ensure informed consent is obtained prior to treating a patient, and that consent is maintained as you care for the patient.

- *Respect patients' preferences, concerns, and autonomy.*
- *Provide patients with alternative options.*
- *Explain and support patients' rights to make an informed choice to:*
  - *be seen by a doctor or another health practitioner*
  - *decline treatment*
  - *decline involvement in teaching 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, including documenting your supervising doctor's involvement in diagnosis and treatment decisions.

- *Complete records in real time, or as soon as possible afterwards.*
- *Inform patients if their information is shared with others involved in their care.*

4. Collaboration

You must:

a. Work collaboratively with other members of the health care team in ways that best serve patients' interests and enhance coordination of patient 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.*

b. Ensure your conduct supports effective working relationships and the delivery of safe care and treatment to patients.

- *You should not tolerate bullying, harassment, or discrimination against other health practitioners or members of the health care team.*
- *Recognise, understand, and respect the different roles, responsibilities, skills, and qualifications of all members of the health care team as part of patient-centred care.*
- *Treat colleagues with courtesy and respect.*

5. Professionalism

You must:

a. Always 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. Act immediately if a patient under your care suffers serious harm and inform the patient (and/or their family/whānau) as soon as practicable.

e. Uphold a patient's right to complain.

- *Advise patients that they can provide 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. Cooperate fully and in a timely manner 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.*

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