



The Society of Homeopaths
representing professional homeopaths

Code of Ethics and Practice

April 2010

The Society of Homeopaths

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Code of Ethics and Practice

Revised APRIL 2010

Introduction

The aim of the Code of Ethics and Practice is to encourage integrity and responsibility in the practice of homeopathy.

Homeopaths should conduct themselves with truthfulness and dignity at all times in relation to their dealings with patients, and colleagues.

The Code describes the standards of conduct and practice The Society of Homeopaths (The Society) expects of its registered, and student clinical members. A homeopath has, by becoming a registered or student clinical member of The Society, agreed to observe and be bound by and observe the Code of Ethics and Practice; to abide by the regulations of The Society and to secure and maintain professional indemnity insurance in respect of their professional practice.

This Code will form the basis upon which the conduct of any registered and student clinical members will be assessed in the event of a complaint, although it cannot be regarded as exhaustive. The purpose of the Society's professional conduct procedures is to ensure that any complaint made against a registered or student clinical member of The Society is processed in a fair, transparent and impartial manner. The Code is intended to act as guidance and assistance to its registered and student clinical members and to protect the interests of the public. The first concern of registered and student clinical members are the needs of the patient within the context of ethical professional conduct. Patients are entitled to rely upon and trust their healthcare practitioners. Registered and student clinical members are expected to maintain high standards of care, competence and conduct.

Homeopaths should recognise that communication is a two-way process which is the basis of a good patient/practitioner relationship. It is misunderstandings in this relationship that form the basis of a significant number of complaints.

The Society encourages, where possible, the resolution of differences between registered and student clinical members and potential complainants through informal mediation before entering into a formal complaint procedure. It is the nature of professional practice that many decisions fall into areas where there is no absolute right and wrong and where a series of conflicting obligations may have to be considered. The Code offers sound guidance on these issues and indicates areas where particular challenges may arise. When in doubt, registered and student clinical members are encouraged to seek advice from The Society of Homeopaths.

It is the responsibility of every homeopath and student clinical member registered with The Society to be familiar with the content of this Code and to be able to explain its requirements satisfactorily to their patients.

Throughout this Code, references to specific legislation or laws shall include every modification, consolidation, and re-enactment, and extension of them for the time being in force. Where written, the singular also includes the plural.

Section 1 - Key principles for practice

These principles are for guidance and are not intended to be exhaustive. It is expected that the relationship between practitioner and patient is one of mutual respect. Every homeopath registered with The Society is expected to:

- 1.1 Put the individual needs of the patient first.
- 1.2 Respect the privacy and dignity of patients.
- 1.3 Treat everyone fairly, respectfully, sensitively and appropriately without discrimination.
- 1.4 Work to foster and maintain the trust of individual patients and the public.
- 1.5 Listen actively and respect the individual patient's views and their right to personal choice.
- 1.6 Encourage patients to take responsibility for their own health, through discussion and provision of information.
- 1.7 Comprehensively record any history the patient may give and the advice and treatment the registered or student clinical member has provided.
- 1.8 Provide comprehensive clear and balanced information to allow patients to make informed choices.
- 1.9 Respect and protect patient confidentiality.
- 1.10 Disclose confidential information only in clearly defined circumstances.
- 1.11 Maintain and develop professional knowledge and skills.
- 1.12 Practise only within the boundaries of their own competence.
- 1.13 Respond promptly and constructively to concerns, criticisms and complaints.
- 1.14 Respect the skills of other health care professionals and where possible work in cooperation with them.
- 1.15 Comply with the current legislation of the country, state or territory where they are practising.
- 1.16 Practice in accordance with the Core Criteria for Homeopathic Practice and the Complementary and Natural Healthcare National Occupational Standards for Homeopathy.

Section 2 - The Patient/Practitioner Relationship

Clarity of Contract

- 1 To ensure that the patient is always able to make informed choices with regard to their healthcare, registered and student clinical members must give full and clear information about their services when commencing homeopathic treatment. This will include written information about the nature of the treatment, charges, availability for advice, confidentiality and security of records.

Informed consent

- 2 To ensure that the patient or their authorised representative is able to give informed consent with regard to healthcare, registered and student clinical members must give clear and sufficient information about the nature of homeopathic treatment, its scope and its limitations, before treatment begins and as appropriate during treatment.
- 3 Registered and student clinical members may also be in a position to offer other complementary therapies. Where another therapy is offered, they must inform the patient prior to treatment about the other therapy and indicate their relevant qualifications, registration with any relevant registering body and adherence to a separate Code of Conduct. And gain informed consent prior to this treatment being commenced.

Referrals

- 4 Referrals can only be made to other practitioners with the patient's consent. The practitioner should ensure that to the best of their knowledge, the practitioner to whom they refer is fully qualified and insured to practice.
- 5 Patients may refer themselves, in which case the homeopath should discuss with their patients the importance of informing their GP and other healthcare professionals if appropriate. The responsibility for altering any prescribed medication lies with the patient and the prescribing practitioner.
- 6 Patients may be referred by a GP, in which case the GP will retain overall clinical responsibility for that patient.
- 7 Patients may be referred by another homeopath or health care practitioner, in which case details of such referrals may be recorded in writing in the notes.
- 8 If at any time the patient declines to give consent for the registered and student clinical member to make contact with their GP or other healthcare practitioner, their wishes are to be respected, and recorded in the notes.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times except where

- the practitioner has serious concerns that the patient may harm themselves or others in which case they should inform the appropriate authority,
 - they are obliged by law to disclose information.
- 9 Continuity of care is important. If a new patient has received treatment within the last six months from another homeopath, the patient's permission should be sought to contact the previous homeopath to obtain details of that treatment. If the patient does not agree to this, a note of their refusal should be recorded and the patient should be made aware that this may adversely affect the continuity of their care.

Hospital Treatment

- 10 Where a patient requests homeopathic treatment to be initiated or continued within a clinical setting, e.g. hospital or hospice, the registered or student clinical member will inform the patient or their representative of the need to notify the person with overall clinical responsibility. The homeopath may offer to write to this person on their behalf before commencing treatment.

Records and record keeping

- 11 All case notes must be clear, legible, current and kept up to date and contain all the relevant information relating to the progress of the case, for example, treatment and any advice that has been given, whether the patient's condition has improved, been maintained or deteriorated since they were last seen. This is important for patient care and essential should the registered or student clinical member at any time be involved in complaints or legal proceedings. The notes should be kept for seven years after the patient was last treated and in the case of children, seven years from their eighteenth birthday.
- 12 For any advice given by telephone or electronic communication, written details should be recorded and included with the notes.
- 13 Where a patient requests the record of their treatment in writing, or asks that the record be forwarded to another homeopath or other practitioner, it is important to send relevant information from that patient's case notes as quickly as possible. The full original notes should be retained in accordance with requirements of the law.

Confidentiality and Disclosure

- 14 Registered and student clinical members must ensure that patient information is kept secure and confidential unless the patient agrees otherwise in writing or where required to disclose by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times except where

- the practitioner has serious concerns that the patient may harm themselves or others in which case they should inform the appropriate authority,
- they are obliged by law to disclose information.

15 A registered or student clinical member must be accurate and factual when writing reports, completing or signing forms or certificates or if required to give evidence in court or a tribunal.

Section 3 - Professional obligations

Competence and Continuing Professional Development

16 Registered and student clinical members will be aware of the limits of their professional competence and where appropriate, will refer to other practitioners ensuring that the practitioner to whom they refer is suitably qualified.

17 Registered and student clinical members should regularly monitor and evaluate their clinical skills and actively extend their knowledge base and their own personal development through continuing professional development.

18 Evidence of continuing professional development will be taken into account when hearing allegations regarding a registered or student clinical members' professional conduct or competence.

Professional practice

19 The patient has the right to know and the homeopath is obliged to offer, the name of any prescribed remedies.

20 Clear instructions for taking the medication must be given for each prescription made.

21 It is recommended that another person be present during a physical examination and that the patient's or representative's permission be obtained before any physical examination is undertaken.

A physical examination of a child under 16 should not be undertaken other than in the presence of a parent or patient's representative and with the child's consent.

22 To be aware that the responsibility for adjusting prescribed medication lies with the patient and the prescriber of that medication.

- 23 The practitioner is responsible for making clear arrangements for patient care if they are absent from practice for any length of time.

If a locum is used then the registered or student clinical member is responsible for ensuring that they are suitably qualified and insured.

Contact with relatives/other interested parties

- 24 Where a member of a patient's family or a friend or other person connected with a patient, initiates contact with the registered and student clinical members, it is the responsibility of the registered and student clinical members to listen carefully to their concerns without breaching confidentiality or contradicting the wishes of the patient. No instructions in relation to treatment should be taken on behalf of a patient unless that person has power of attorney.

Child Protection

- 25 When there is evidence or strong suspicion of a young person being at risk, the registered or student clinical member is required to contact the appropriate officer at the Social Services Department or relevant department.

Inappropriate use of patient related materials

- 26 Registered and student clinical members must obtain written permission for recording any part of the consultation. They should avoid recording on film, video or through digital techniques, any material or imagery concerning a patient which might be regarded as explicit, indecent or pornographic.
- 27 Registered and student clinical members will only use film, tape recording or digital imagery of material concerning a patient with that patient's clear, informed, written consent to the precise use of the material. The material may only be used in a confidential setting. The patient will be given explicit information as to the purpose the material is to be used for. Permission may be revoked at any time. The patient should not feel pressured to give consent. If the registered or student clinical member wishes to use the material for a different purpose than the one given, a supplementary permission must be obtained.

Professional boundaries

- 28 It is never appropriate for a registered or student clinical member to pursue or enter into an intimate relationship with a patient, student or supervisee. Such a relationship is potentially abusive of the person concerned and undermines the relationship of trust. Registered and student clinical members should ensure that a professional relationship is maintained at all times.

- 29 Where a registered or student clinical member needs support to manage a potentially difficult situation of this nature, guidance should be sought from supervision, or from the Professional Conduct Officer for The Society.

Research

- 30 Registered and student clinical members intending to undertake research must be familiar with and abide by current research ethics requirements, research governance and all relevant statutory obligations.
- 31 For any homeopathic proving, provers will be entitled to the same level of care and supervision as patients.

Section 4 - Legal Obligations

Criminal and civil law

- 32 Registered and student clinical members are required to comply with the criminal and relevant civil law of the country, state or territory where they are practising.
- 33 Registered and student clinical members must observe and are responsible for keeping up to date with all legislation and regulations relating directly or indirectly relating to the practice of homeopathy.
- 34 References to any legislation or regulations throughout this code shall include any amendments or other alterations, repeals or replacements made in law since the date they came into force. Any reference to the singular shall include the plural and references to the feminine shall include the masculine.

Data Protection

- 35 Where any patient records are stored electronically registered and student clinical members must comply with the Data Protection Act.
- 36 In order to comply with the Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation, full and clear records of all treatments of patients are taken, kept and stored for at least seven years from the date of the last appointment and in the case of children, at least seven years from their eighteenth birthday.
- 37 Patients have rights of access to their health records in accordance with the requirements of the law. Registered and student clinical members are entitled to make an administrative charge if a patient wishes to have a copy of their notes. The original notes are the property of the homeopath.

Advertising and Media

- 38 All advertising must be published in a way that conforms to the law and to (the guidance issued in the British Code of Advertising Practice).
- 39 Professional advertising must be factual and not seek to mislead or deceive, or make unrealistic or extravagant claims. Advertising may indicate special interests but must not make claims of superiority or disparage professional colleagues or other professionals. No promise of cure, either implicit or explicit, should be made of any named disease. All research should be presented clearly honestly and without distortion, all speculative theories will be stated as such and clearly distinguished.
- 40 Advertising content and the way it is distributed must not put prospective patients under pressure to consult or seek treatment from a registered or student clinical member.
- 41 No registered or student clinical member may use their Society registration status in the advertisement or promotion of any product or remedy.

Potential misrepresentation

- 42 The use of the title 'Doctor' should be avoided, when the use of that title may create a false impression that the individual concerned is a registered medical practitioner or entitled to be a registered medical practitioner in the United Kingdom.
- 43 Reference to assistants as 'Nurse' is not acceptable unless the individual concerned is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).
- 44 Claims, whether explicit or implied, orally or in writing, implying cure of any named disease must be avoided.

Notifiable diseases

- 45 Registered and student clinical members should be aware of those diseases which are notifiable under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act, and take appropriate action in these cases, referring the patient to their Primary Health Care Professional.

Treatment of animals

- 46 Registered and student clinical members should be aware of and observe the law with regard to the treatment of animals with homeopathy.

Section 5 - Organisational Issues

Premises

- 47 Registered and student clinical members must comply with national and local legal obligations and regulations regarding premises and the safety of staff and patient facilities. Premises, equipment and medicines are to be kept in a serviceable, hygienic and secure condition.
- 48 A regular review of facilities and working practices must be undertaken to ensure they comply with current standards. Registered and student clinical members should be aware of their responsibilities under Health and Safety legislation (Health & Safety Act 1974) and other relevant legislation whether employer, employee or self-employed.

Insurance

- 49 Practising registered and student clinical members shall have appropriate professional indemnity insurance cover at all times.

Section 6 - Practice Issues

Problems with health

- 50 If the mental, emotional or physical health of a registered or student clinical member is impaired for any reason, and patients may be put at risk, the registered or student clinical member must seek and follow professional advice on whether, and how, to modify their practice so as to safeguard the interests of their patients. It may be necessary to stop practising or to receive professional supervision in order to establish fitness to practise. The registered or student clinical member should inform the registrar in confidence, if this is the case. If a registered or student clinical member has any concerns about another registered or student clinical members' mental, emotional or physical health, they should seek appropriate advice from the Professional Conduct Officer.
- 51 In the event of the retirement, illness or death of a registered or student clinical member, arrangements must be made to ensure that patients are notified and their notes are, with their consent, passed to any successor practitioner.

When trust is compromised

52 Where, for whatever reason, the necessary relationship of mutual trust breaks down, either the registered or student clinical member or the patient may terminate the professional relationship. If this happens, the registered or student clinical member should ensure that the patient has an alternative source of homeopathic care if they want it. With the patient's permission, the new practitioner should be provided with sufficient information to take over responsibility for the patient's care without delay.

Complaints

53 Homeopaths trained to The Society standards and who follow the guidance in this Code are able to practise homeopathy safely, competently and ethically. However, if for whatever reason, their practice is brought into doubt and the matter cannot be resolved by mediation between the registered or student clinical member and the complainant, the matter should be referred to The Society.

54 Patients, members of the public, other professionals and those registered with The Society have the right to complain to the Professional Conduct Department of The Society if they perceive that a registered or student clinical member has not treated them, or conducted themselves, in accordance with this Code.

55 Registered and student clinical members should ensure that a patient has clear information about how to express any concern they may have about their treatment. In handling any complaint directly, the registered or student clinical member should act promptly and constructively, putting the interests of the patient first, and co-operating fully with any external investigation.

56 Any patient bringing an apparent failure in care, as described within this Code, to the registered or student clinical members' attention is entitled to proper investigation and a sensitive explanation of what has occurred. The registered or student clinical member will take the initiative to put things right, and, where appropriate, offer a suitable apology and assurance that steps have been taken to prevent reoccurrence.

57 Registered and student clinical members are encouraged at an early stage to ensure that any steps taken are in conjunction with The Society's Professional Conduct processes.

- 58 The procedures and powers of The Society provide a mechanism for patients, members of the public, other professionals or registered and student clinical members of The Society to raise allegations of professional misconduct and for registered and student clinical members involved to have the right to respond to any such allegations.
- 59 The conduct of any registered or student clinical member may have an impact on their reputation and the reputation of homeopathy. Such conduct may occur within or outside their professional practice and it may be necessary for such matters to be brought to the attention of The Society for consideration under the Professional Conduct Procedures. It may also be necessary in certain circumstances, including but not limited to criminal or other legal proceedings being implemented, to suspend or remove a registered and student clinical member from the register.

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First issue 1987 Second issue 1992 Third issue July 1996 Fourth Issue March 2001
Fifth Issue July 2003 Sixth Issue April 2004 Seventh Issue April 2010