



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

GOOD PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE – GENERAL PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIANS AND SPECIALISTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

This document adapts the General Medical Council's Good Medical Practice to be relevant for all public health specialists – public health physicians (PHPs)/specialists in public health (SPHs). The definition of specialists which applies is 'those entitled to management and intellectual authority in public health through their knowledge, skills and experience'.¹ The purpose of the document is to set out a framework of professional values which underpin practice. (As such, they are useful as a basis for NHS appraisal and revalidation as established by the DoH and the GMC and potentially useful for accreditation of SPHs once a register has been established.) They have been included in the work on standards for public health specialists produced by the Tripartite Group. For public health physicians, some of their work may still be of a clinical nature and will be governed by Good Medical Practice and both documents should be ready alongside each other.

Duties and responsibilities in public health

The principles of good public health practice and the standards of competence, care and conduct expected of you in all aspects of your professional work apply to all public health physicians(PHPs)/specialists in public health(SPHs) including those in training.

The standards against which you will be judged have been adapted from the GMC document *Good Medical Practice* and made appropriate for public health practice. The seven core elements are:

1. Good public health practice

PHPs/SPHs must:

- practise good standards of public health, as described in the Faculty's work on GPHP, with particular reference to the ten key areas of activity and their necessary competencies;

¹ "The Faculty of Public Health and Future Standards in Public Health"; Prof Stephen Frankel; *ph.com*, March 2001.

- make sure that individuals and communities are not put at risk; and
- work within the limits of their professional competence.

2. Maintaining good public health practice

PHPs/SPHs must:

- keep their knowledge and skills up to date;
- regularly take part in educational activities that develop their skills; and
- try to act on what is said during appraisals.

3. Teaching and training

PHPs/SPHs with special teaching responsibilities must:

- develop the skills, attitudes and practices of a competent teacher; and
- be honest and objective when they are assessing the performance of someone they have trained.

4. Relations with individuals and communities

PHPs/SPHs must:

- make the health of their communities and individuals within them their first concern;
- treat all individuals politely and considerately;
- respect individuals/patients' dignity and privacy;
- listen to individuals and communities and respect their views;
- give information to individuals and the public in a way they can understand; and
- respect individuals/communities' right to be fully involved in decisions about their health and health care.

5. Working with colleagues

PHPs/SPHs must work effectively with their health care colleagues, local government colleagues and all other colleagues. Co-operation, trust and flexibility and team working are essential to good public health practice.

6. Probity

PHPs/SPHs must:

- be honest and trustworthy;
- respect and protect confidential information;
- make sure that personal beliefs do not interfere with their work at any level;
- act quickly to protect individuals and communities from any risk; and
- not abuse their position.

7. Health

If a PHP/SPH has a serious condition that could affect their performance, or could be passed on to patients or the public, they must seek and follow advice from an appropriate colleague.

1. Good public health practice

The core elements of public health practice have been agreed by the Faculty of Public Health. Work is currently going on to define standards of practice and levels of competence for specialist areas for whom some core elements are more relevant than others. However, it is expected that all public health practitioners will have basic competence within each core element.

- 1.1 All populations are entitled to good standards of public health practice, based on the Faculty's ten key areas of public health, from public health physicians and specialists.

10 KEY AREAS

1. **Surveillance** and **assessment** of the population's health and well-being (including managing, analysing and interpreting information, knowledge and statistics).
2. **Promoting** and **protecting** the population's **health** and well-being.
3. Developing **quality** and risk management within an **evaluative** culture.
4. **Collaborative** working for health.
5. Developing **health programmes** and services and **reducing inequalities**.
6. **Policy** and **strategy development** and implementation.
7. Working with and **for communities**.
8. **Strategic leadership** for health.
9. **Research** and **development**.
10. **Ethically** managing self, people and resources (including education and continuing professional development).

Essential elements of this are professional competence, described in the Faculty papers on training² and continuing professional development³, good relationships with the public and colleagues, and observance of professional ethical obligations. Standards for practice in the different professional specialisms within public health practice are currently being developed.

1.2 Good public health practice must include:

- high standards of competence in the ten key areas of public health practice;
- taking suitable and prompt action when necessary;
- seeking help from relevant partners.

1.3 In your work you must:

- recognise and work within the limits of your professional competence;
- be willing to consult colleagues;
- be competent when undertaking the tasks required of you;
- keep clear, accurate and contemporaneous records which report the relevant findings, the decisions made, the information given to colleagues/the public;
- keep colleagues well informed when working in partnership;
- pay due regard to efficacy and the use of resources;
- advise only the course of action which best serves the population's needs.

1.4 If you have good reason to think that your ability to practise safely is seriously compromised by inadequate premises, equipment or other resources, you should put the matter right, if that is possible. In all other cases you should draw the matter to the attention of your employing body. You should record your concerns and the steps you have taken to try to resolve them.

1.5 **Decisions about access to health care**

The investigations or treatment you provide or arrange must be based on your judgement of the population/individual needs and the likely effectiveness of the treatment/intervention. You must not allow your views about a patient's lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, gender, sexuality, disability, age or social or economic status, to prejudice the treatment you provide or arrange.

² Faculty of Public Health (2001), Public Health Training Portfolio

³ Faculty of Public Health (2002) Lifelong Learning: The Second Cycle of CPD for Public Health

You must not refuse or delay because you believe that an individual's actions have contributed to their condition.

1.6 **Treatment in emergencies**

In an emergency, wherever it may arise, you must offer anyone at risk the assistance you could reasonably be expected to provide.

2. Maintaining good public health practice

Keeping up to date

- 2.1. You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life. In particular, you should take part regularly in educational activities that develop your competence and performance.
- 2.2. Some parts of public health practice are governed by law or are regulated by other statutory bodies. You must observe and keep up to date with the laws and statutory codes of practice which affect your work.
- 2.3. You must work with colleagues to monitor and maintain your awareness of the quality of the practice you provide. In particular, you must:
 - take part in regular and systematic audit, recording data honestly. Where necessary you must respond to the results of audit to improve your practice, for example by undertaking further training;
 - respond constructively to assessments and appraisals of your professional competence and performance;
 - take part in confidential inquiries and critical incident reporting.

3. Teaching and training

- 3.1. You are encouraged to help the public to be aware of and understand health issues and to contribute to the education and training of other doctors, medical students and colleagues.
- 3.2. If you have special responsibilities for teaching you must develop the skills, attitudes and practices of a competent teacher. You must also make sure that students and junior colleagues are properly supervised. This applies to all practitioners.
- 3.3. You must be honest and objective when assessing the performance of those you have supervised or trained. Patients and the public may be put at risk if

you confirm the competence of someone who has not reached or maintained a satisfactory standard of practice.

4. Relations with individuals and communities

The word community can be applied to professional communities, geographic communities or communities of interest with which a PHP/SPH has a working relationship.

Professional relationships

4.1 Successful relationships depend on trust. To establish and maintain that trust you must:

- listen to individuals and the public and respect their views;
- treat individuals and the public politely and considerately;
- respect individuals' privacy and dignity;
- treat information about patients as confidential. If in exceptional circumstances you feel you should pass on information without a patient or an individual's consent, or against their wishes, you should follow agreed guidance on confidentiality and be prepared to justify your decision;
- give individuals and the public the information they ask for or need;
- give information to the public in a way they can understand;
- be satisfied that, wherever possible, the public has understood what is proposed;
- respect the right of the public/individuals to be fully involved in decisions about their care;
- respect the right of the public/individuals to decline treatment or decline to take part in teaching or research;
- be readily accessible to the public and colleagues when you are on duty;
- be vigilant about issues concerning data confidentiality.

4.2 The research studies you provide or arrange must be based on your professional judgement of the patient/population's needs and the likely effectiveness of any intervention. You must not allow your views about an individual's lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, gender, sexuality, age,

social status, or perceived economic worth to prejudice your work or advice on the treatment you advise.

- 4.3 If you feel that your beliefs might affect your work, you must explain this to senior colleagues.
- 4.4 You must not delay because you believe that communities/patients' actions have contributed to their condition, or because you may be putting yourself at risk. If a patient poses a risk to your health or safety you may take reasonable steps to protect yourself before investigating their condition or providing treatment. This is particularly applicable to communicable disease control.
- 4.5 You must always treat individuals and the public fairly. In accordance with the law, you must not discriminate on grounds of their gender, race, or disability. You must not allow your views of an individual's or member of the public's lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, sex, sexuality or age to prejudice your professional relationship with them.

If things go wrong

- 4.6 Individuals who complain about the care or treatment they have received have a right to expect a prompt and appropriate response. As a public health physician/specialist you have a professional responsibility to deal with complaints constructively and honestly. You should co-operate with any complaints procedure that applies to your work. You must not allow an individual's complaint to prejudice the care or treatment you provide or arrange for that patient.
- 4.7 Subject to your right not to provide evidence which may lead to criminal proceedings being taken against you, you must co-operate fully with any formal inquiry. You should not withhold relevant information. Similarly, you must assist the coroner or procurator fiscal with an inquest or inquiry.
- 4.4 4.8 If you are suspended from a post or have restrictions put on your practice because of concerns about your performance or conduct, you must inform any other organisations for whom you undertake work of a similar nature. You must also inform any patients you see independently of such organisations, if the treatment you provide is within the area of concern relating to the suspension or restriction.
- 4.9 In your own interests, you must obtain adequate insurance or professional indemnity cover for any part of your practice not covered by an employer's indemnity scheme.

Dealing with problems in professional practice

Conduct or performance of colleagues

- 4.10 You must protect individuals/the public from risk of harm posed by another doctor's or other health care professional's conduct, performance or health, including problems arising from alcohol or other substance abuse. The safety of individuals/the public must come first at all times. Where there are serious concerns about a colleague's performance, health or conduct, it is essential that steps are taken without delay to investigate the concerns to establish whether they are well-founded, and to protect individuals/the public.
- 4.11 If you have grounds to believe that a doctor or other healthcare professional may be putting individuals/the public at risk, you must give an honest explanation of your concerns to an appropriate person from the employing authority, such as the medical director, nursing director, chief executive, the director of public health or an officer of your local medical committee, following any procedures set by the employer. If there are no appropriate local systems, or local systems cannot resolve the problem, and you remain concerned about the safety of individuals/the public, you should inform the relevant regulatory body. If you are not sure what to do, discuss your concerns with an impartial colleague or contact your defence body, a professional organisation or the GMC for advice. The safety of individuals/the public must come first at all times.
- 4.12 If you have management responsibilities you should ensure that mechanisms are in place through which colleagues can raise concerns about risks to individuals/the public. Further guidance is provided in the GMC booklet, *Management in Health Care: the Role of Doctors*.

5. Working with colleagues

- 5.1 You must always treat your colleagues fairly. In accordance with the law, you must not discriminate against colleagues on grounds of their gender, race or disability. You must not allow your views of a colleague's lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, sex, sexuality or age to prejudice your professional relationship with them.
- 5.2 You must not undermine individuals/the public's trust in the care or treatment they receive, or in the judgement of those treating them, by making malicious or unfounded criticisms of colleagues.

Working in teams

- 5.3 Public health/health care is increasingly provided by multidisciplinary teams. Working in a team does not change your personal accountability for your professional conduct and the care you provide. When working in a team, you

must:

- respect the skills and contributions of your colleagues;
- maintain professional relationships with individuals/the public;
- communicate effectively with colleagues within and outside the team;
- make sure individuals/the public and colleagues understand your professional status and specialty, your role and responsibilities in the team, and who is responsible for each aspect of individual/the public's care;
- participate in regular reviews and audit of the standards and performance of the team, taking steps to remedy any deficiencies.
- be willing to deal openly and supportively with problems in the performance, conduct or health of team members.

5.4 If you lead the team you must ensure that:

- medical team members meet the standards of care and conduct set in this guidance;
- any problems that might prevent colleagues from other professions from following guidance from their own regulatory bodies are brought to your attention and addressed;
- all team members understand their personal and collective responsibility for the safety of individuals/the public and for openly and honestly recording and discussing problems;
- each individuals/the public's care is properly co-ordinated and managed, and that individuals/the public know who to contact if they have questions or concerns;
- arrangements are in place to provide cover at all times;
- regular reviews and audit of the standards and performance of the team are undertaken and any deficiencies addressed;
- systems are in place for dealing supportively with problems in the performance, conduct or health of team members.

5.5 Further advice on working in teams is provided in the GMC booklets *Maintaining Good Medical Practice* and *Management in Health Care, the role of Doctors*.

Arranging cover

- 5.6 You must be satisfied that, when you are off duty, suitable arrangements are in place. These arrangements should include effective handover procedures and clear communication between those responsible.

Accepting posts

- 5.7 If you have formally accepted any post, including a temporary post, you must not then withdraw unless the employer will have time to make other arrangements.

Delegation and referral

- 5.8 When you delegate you must be sure that the person to whom you delegate is competent to carry out the work involved. You must always pass on enough information. You will still be responsible for the overall population.

Providing information about your services

- 5.9 If you publish or broadcast information, the information must be factual and verifiable. It must be published in a way that conforms with the law and with the guidance issued by the Advertising Standards Authority. If you publish information about specialist services, you must still follow the guidance.
- 5.10 Information you publish about your services must not put pressure on people to use a service, for example by arousing ill-founded fear for their future health.

Your duty to protect the population

- 5.11 You must protect the health of the population when you believe that a colleague's health, conduct or performance is a threat to their standard of practice.

References

- 3.4.1 5.12 When providing references for colleagues your comments must be honest and justifiable; you must include all relevant information that has a bearing on the colleague's competence, performance, reliability and conduct.

6. Probity - financial and commercial dealings

Probity in professional practice

- 6.1 You must be honest in financial and commercial matters relating to your work. In particular:
- if you manage finances, you must make sure that the funds are used for the purpose they were intended for and are kept in a separate account from your personal finances;
 - you must not defraud the organisation you work for;
 - before taking part in discussions about buying goods or services, you must declare any relevant financial or commercial interest which you or your family might have in the purchase.

Conflicts of interest

- 6.2 You must not ask for or accept any inducement, gift or hospitality which may affect or be seen to affect your judgement. You should not offer such inducements to colleagues.

Financial interests in hospitals, nursing homes and other medical organisations

- 6.3 If you have financial or commercial interests in organisations providing health care or in pharmaceutical or other biomedical companies, these must not affect the way you work.
- 6.4 If you have a financial or commercial interest in an organisation to which you work, you must tell your employer about your interest.

Accepting gifts and other inducements

- 6.5 You should not ask for or accept any material gifts or loans, except those of insignificant value, from companies that sell or market drugs or appliances. You must not ask for or accept fees for agreeing to meet sales representatives.

Hospitality

- 6.6 You may accept personal travel grants and hospitality from companies for conferences or educational meetings, as long as the main purpose of the event is educational. The amount you receive must not be more than you would normally spend if you were paying for yourself.

Signing certificates and other documents

- 6.7 You must take reasonable steps to verify any statement before you sign a document. You must not sign documents which you believe to be false or misleading.

Research

- 6.8 If you take part in clinical drug trials or other research involving patients or volunteers you must make sure that the individual has given written consent to take part in the trial and that the research is not contrary to the individual's interests. You should always seek further advice where your research involves adults who are not able to make decisions for themselves. You may also benefit from additional advice where your research involves children. You must check that the research protocol has been approved by a properly constituted research ethics committee.
- 6.9 You have an absolute duty to conduct all research with honesty and integrity. In particular:
- you must follow all aspects of the research protocol; you may accept only those payments approved by a research ethics committee;
 - your conduct must not be influenced by payments or gifts;
 - you must always record your research results truthfully and maintain adequate records;
 - when publishing results you must not make unjustified claims for authorship;
 - you have a duty to report evidence of fraud or misconduct in research to an appropriate person or authority.

7. Health

If your health may put patients at risk

- 7.1 If you know that you have a serious condition which you could pass on to individuals/the public, or that your judgement or performance could be significantly affected by a condition or illness, or its treatment, you must take and follow advice from a consultant in occupational health or another suitably qualified colleague on whether, and in what ways, you should modify your practice. Do not rely on your own assessment of the risk to patients.
- 7.2 If you think you have a serious condition which you could pass on to individuals/the public, you must have all the necessary tests and act on the

advice given to you by a suitably qualified colleague about necessary treatment and/or modifications to your clinical practice.

This paper is not exhaustive. It should be seen as complementary to Good Medical Practice, which also applies to public health physicians, but it provides the basis of professional practice. It cannot cover all forms of professional practice or misconduct which may bring your registration into question if you are a doctor. You must therefore always be prepared to explain and justify your actions and decisions.

This paper will be reviewed and updated if necessary in January 2003.