

Code of Conduct for Healthcare Support Workers



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Working to standard: a code of conduct for support workers in healthcare

1. Introduction

1.1 Welcome to this code of conduct for support workers in healthcare.

1.2 As a healthcare support worker, you play a vital role in:

- helping the NHS deliver its services
- protecting patients and the public from harm and
- valuing all aspects of equality and diversity.

What you do has a big impact on the quality of healthcare for people who use the service.

1.3 This code of conduct is necessary because the work you do as a member of the healthcare team is very important. The code is a list of statements that set the standard for how you should work on a day-to-day basis.

1.4. The code is here to help you, your employer and the patients¹ and the public² you work with. It is based on the basic principle of **protecting the public**, and mirrors what is required of all 'regulated' healthcare professionals you may work alongside.

1.5. You can use the code to check that you are 'working to standard'. Your employer can use it to make sure that the service is meeting the standards and that both public and patient safety is assured. Employers can also use it to help them understand what kind of service they can expect from you and your colleagues.

1.6. The statements are based on existing good practice. You'll probably find you are already working to standard in most, if not all of them. If not, the code will show you how you can change the way you work to make sure you are working to standard.

¹ The term 'patient' is used throughout the code. However, in practice you may hear patients being referred to as 'service users', 'clients' or 'residents'. Basically, the term means any person that you come into contact with who needs care.

² The term 'the public' is also used throughout the code and refers to the people with whom you come in to contact with, or to whom you provide a service, in the name of NHSScotland but who may not fall into the category of "patient", for example a blood donor.

1.7. The statements are designed for all healthcare support workers in NHS Scotland, wherever you work and whatever job you do. So, it is a national **code of conduct** that will help to make sure that patients all over the country can get the same high-quality, safe and effective service from healthcare support workers.

1.8. Your employer also has a code of practice to guide how they treat you as a worker and how they can support you to achieve the required standard reflected in this code.

2. Where has the code come from?

2.1. The first version of the code was developed by a working group brought together by the Scottish Executive Health Department in 2006. The group worked very closely with similar groups in other parts of the UK to make sure that the statements in the code are the right ones. The group took special care to make sure that the code is in keeping with 'like' codes in other relevant sectors, such as social services. The code has since been tested by the Scottish Government Health Directorates, as part of a pilot project in 2007 - 08, and has been reviewed and finalised as a result. The pilot demonstrated unanimous support for the code.

3. Working 'to standard'

3.1 As a support worker, you are expected to work to a certain standard. You need to be able to do your job properly, behave properly, and do the right thing at all times. This is essential to protect patients, members of the public and others from harm. Patients and their relatives, your employer and your colleagues all expect this, and you should expect this of yourself.

3.2 But what does this mean on a day-to-day basis? It means that in your work, you should always be of 'good character'. This means that you should always display the characteristics outlined in paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.13 below.

Good character

3.2.1. Accountability - making sure that you can always 'answer' for your actions or omissions.

Make sure you are happy with the things you do (actions) and the things you don't do (omissions) in your daily work and that you can justify them to patients, members of the public, your supervisor, your employer and others. You must carry out only the tasks agreed in your job description or specification so that your employer knows what you are likely to be doing and, based on this, agrees to accept liability (known as 'vicarious liability') for your actions.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on accountability?

When you are working to standard on accountability, you may be asked to explain anything that you do or do not do with, or for, the patient or member of the public for whom you provide a service. So, you need good reasons for the way you have acted. Your employers will draw on the knowledge and skills you have used when they judge your actions. Make sure that you record your actions in line with your employer's procedures. By taking part in ongoing monitoring of your performance, you are showing you are aware of your accountability.

3.2.2 Awareness – being honest with yourself and others about what you can do.

Know yourself, what you can do and what you can't do. The safety of your patients and members of the public is your first priority. Always ask colleagues for help if you have any worries or concerns about your abilities.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on awareness?

When you're working to standard on awareness, you'll know yourself well enough to know what you can do. You'll show you understand that some procedures can only be carried out by people who have had special training; and that, in certain circumstances, you need permission from qualified or supervisory staff before you do certain things with or for patients or members of the public. If you feel you're being asked to do something you haven't been trained to do, and that you don't have the skills to do it, you will speak up.

3.2.3. Integrity - always do what is right to protect the patient or member of the public for whom you provide a service.

Always do your best to make sure nothing you or anyone else does, or does not do, will harm the person's mental or physical health or wellbeing or delay their recovery.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on integrity?

When you're working to standard on integrity, you will be protecting patients and the public in every way you can, taking into account all aspects of equality and diversity. You should be prepared to report issues that cause you to worry.

3.2.4. Advocacy - doing your best for patients, members of the public and their relatives.

This means being responsible for promoting and protecting the interests of people in receipt of services, many of whom may not be able to protect their own interests. This could involve speaking up for people to make sure that what is best for each individual is always taken into account.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on advocacy?

When you're working to standard on advocacy, you'll be putting patients' and members of the public's interests first at all times and making sure that you are meeting their wants and needs. All people are individuals with different likes and dislikes and you must acknowledge their equality and diversity to make sure that you treat them equally and fairly.

3.2.5. Sensitivity – respecting the patient / member of the public.

Every patient or member of the public is an individual with real feelings and emotions. When working with patients or members of the public, think about how they may be feeling and what the most appropriate response to their situation is.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on sensitivity?

When you're working to standard on sensitivity, you'll be treating patients, members of the public and their relatives politely while being aware of the situation they are in and their reactions to it. For example, they may be feeling confused, angry or frustrated. It is important that you are sensitive to this and do not take their reactions personally.

3.2.6. Objectivity – treating all patients and members of the public fairly and without bias.

Access to high quality care should be fair and consistent. There should be no discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation or religion or belief. There is a legal duty on public bodies and their employees to promote race, disability and gender equality, and a wider commitment to promoting equality on grounds of sexual orientation, age and religion or belief will help public bodies avoid unlawful discrimination in these areas too. Personal feelings about patients or members of the public must not interfere with the standard of your work. You must provide all patients with high-quality care which reflects their individual needs. This means that you owe patients a 'duty of care' and they can expect a 'reasonable' standard of care from all workers. It is expected that you would treat all members of the public like this.

It is also important to maintain clear boundaries when caring for patients or members of the public. This means that you should always have a 'professional' relationship with your patients. If you have any strong feelings about a patient's religious, social or cultural beliefs, you should tell your manager as soon as possible so they can take appropriate action.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on objectivity?

When you're working to standard on objectivity, you'll be working to the same high standard with every person you work with. It should not matter to you what the person is like as an individual, what race or religion they are or how they live their life. You will see all people in receipt of service as worthy of your respect and best efforts.

3.2.7. Consideration and respect - making sure people are always treated with dignity.

Consider and respect people's privacy to make sure that neither you nor they are ever placed in an embarrassing situation.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on consideration and respect?

When you're working to standard on consideration, you'll always show thoughtfulness for people's feelings and needs. You'll protect patients and members of the public to make sure that they are never unnecessarily exposed to embarrassing situations – whether in front of relatives, fellow patients or healthcare workers.

3.2.8. Consent – telling patients and members of the public what you intend to do and listening carefully to what they say about it.

Working in partnership with the person at all times is a basic principle that you must keep to at all times. Always explain what you intend to do with patients and members of the public, even when it is basic care or routine procedures, and only continue with your planned work once the person agrees to it. You must check that this agreement is written in the person's records, and you should report any concerns that the person or a relative has to your supervisor.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on consent?

When you're working to standard on consent, you'll be demonstrating that you will always make sure that the person knows what you are planning to do and is happy with it. If the person cannot give consent for themselves, because of their age or condition, you must always check with a relative or a senior member of staff. If the person or relative has not agreed to what you plan to do, you must not do it. Always check with a senior member of staff if you are in any doubt.

3.2.9. Confidentiality – protecting the person's privacy.

Confidentiality is essential to protect the interests of patients and members of the public. It is a main feature of any code of conduct and of most terms and conditions of service in a healthcare environment. So you must make sure that you don't give out personal information about patients or members of the public, or about their condition or treatment, to anyone other than colleagues in the team who need to know the information to help in the delivery of service to the person. If you do not protect the person's right to confidentiality, you may be breaking data-protection laws. If you feel that a person is at risk of harm, and that you need to speak out, you should tell your supervisor. You should not discuss those in receipt of services with anyone outside work.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on confidentiality?

When you're working to standard on confidentiality, you'll maintain a professional attitude at all times when handling information relating to a patient or member of the public and you won't 'gossip' to anyone at any time. When you do pass on information to a colleague as part of your job, you will take care to be accurate and clear in what you say or write.

3.2.10. Co-operation – working effectively with your colleagues as part of a team.

Value the part you play in the team and respect the part played by other members of the team.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on co-operation?

When you're working to standard on co-operation, the contribution you make to the team will be valued. You'll be communicating effectively, sharing information and working to meet the team's shared goals in the best interests of the people you provide a service for.

3.2.11. Protection – making sure you don't put patients, members of the public and colleagues at risk of harm.

Make sure patients, members of the public, visitors and colleagues are protected from dangers and risks and that nothing you do, or don't do, results in harm or risk to others.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard on protection'?

When you're working to standard on protection, you'll know the dangers patients, members of the public and colleagues face at work and will do what you can to reduce risks of accidents or harm. You will also make sure you report any concerns you have to a supervisor to reduce risks in the future.

3.2.12. Development - trying to increase your own knowledge and skills by talking to patients, members of the public and colleagues and looking for opportunities to learn.

If you are interested in your work and feel comfortable using the knowledge you need to carry out your job, you will be able to offer a better service to patients and members of the public and you should feel more motivated as a result.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on development?

When you're working to standard on development, you'll be taking every chance you can to protect patient and public safety by improving the way you work. This could be by attending a course, shadowing a colleague or listening to feedback from patients and members of the public. You'll continually monitor, evaluate and reflect on what you do at work and try to do it to the best of your ability.

3.2.13. Alertness – observing any changes that could affect a patient's or member of the public's needs or progress.

Always try to notice when a patient or member of the public isn't doing what you expect of them and report your observations to an appropriate person.

How will I know if I'm 'working to standard' on alertness?

When you're working to standard on alertness, you will notice when patients or members of the public are 'just not right'. You'll notice, for instance, when the patient can't move as well as usual, appears less alert or perhaps hasn't eaten their meal. You'll also notice when things in the workplace are not as they should be, relating for example to aspects of service delivery. Reporting these observations will be in the best interests of the people in receipt of your services.

4. What this means for you

4.1. The code of conduct means that, as a healthcare support worker, you have a responsibility to work to standard. This means that you must do the following.

4.1.1. Only do what your job description or specification allows you to do. If you do something, or accept an instruction from another healthcare worker to do something that isn't within your job description or specification or level of skill, you could be putting the safety of the patient or member of the public at risk and you could be disciplined. Let your manager or supervisor know if you feel you are being asked to do something you don't know how to, or something you know isn't in your job description or specification.

4.1.2. It is within the code of conduct of all healthcare professionals not to delegate tasks unless they are sure that the person they are delegating to has the skills and is happy to perform the task. The person who delegates will remain professionally accountable for delegating the task. However, if you accept the task, you will be accountable for how well you perform it.

4.1.3. Make sure that you always follow the standard procedures for carrying out tasks and duties.

4.1.4. Make sure that you obtain consent, in line with your organisation's policies, before doing anything to a patient or member of the public.

4.1.5. Follow the rules on 'duty of care' (see paragraph 3.2.6). This means you must always make sure patients, members of the public and colleagues don't come to harm because of something you've done or something you have not done, or because you've been careless or taken risks.

4.1.6. Making notes and keeping patients' and members of the public's records up to date and accurate is an essential part of your service. You should only write down information relevant to the service you have given to patients, and get an appropriate person to sign the record in line with your organisation's policy. If you are not sure, ask for advice. As you are accountable for anything you write, no matter how informal it might seem, what you write can be used as evidence in any enquiry by your employer or the courts in the future.

4.1.7. Raise issues you are concerned about with your line manager where these relate to:

- how care or service is delivered;
- the personal health, safety and security of patients and members of the public; or
- harm and abuse of patients or members of the public.

5. Want to know more?

5.1. If you'd like to find out more about the issues in this code of conduct, talk to your manager, supervisor, trade union representative or a member of your relevant professional association. You could also have a look at the following sources.

- The NHS Scotland Staff Governance Standard for NHS Scotland employees and associated PIN guidelines.
<http://www.staffgovernance.scot.nhs.uk/>
- Blowing the Whistle – advice from the Royal College of Nursing on how to speak up if you feel something is seriously wrong in your workplace.
http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/78520/001510.pdf
- The Duty of Care – a UNISON handbook to help healthcare staff to carry out their duty of care to patients, colleagues and themselves.
<http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/13038.pdf>
- The Nursing & Midwifery Council's (and other professional regulators) guidelines on records and record keeping. See <http://www.healthworkerstandards.scot.nhs.uk/pages/profRegStat.htm> for information on links to the different regulatory organisations' websites.
- Your organisation's information on consent, confidentiality and diversity and equality.



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