

In practice:
Guidance on
religion, personal
values and beliefs

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The General Pharmaceutical Council is the regulator for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacies in England, Scotland and Wales. As part of our role, we set the standards that pharmacy professionals have to meet throughout their careers.

About this guidance

This guidance should be read alongside the **standards for pharmacy professionals** which all pharmacy professionals must meet.

It gives further guidance to pharmacy professionals on applying standard 1, when their religion, personal values or beliefs might impact on their willingness to provide certain services.

Pharmacy professionals should use their professional judgement in applying this guidance in practice and be able to justify their decisions. This guidance cannot cover every situation and does not give legal advice on equalities-related issues. However, it sets out the key factors for pharmacy professionals to consider when applying the standards in this context.

Pharmacy professionals should satisfy themselves that all members of the team are familiar with the issues raised within this guidance and understand their own responsibilities in relation to religion, personal values and beliefs in pharmacy.

Standard 1 says:

Pharmacy professionals must provide person-centred care

Applying the standard

Every person is an individual with their own values, needs and concerns. Person-centred care is delivered when pharmacy professionals



understand what is important to the individual and then adapt the care to meet their needs – making the care of the person their first priority. All pharmacy professionals can demonstrate ‘person-centredness’, whether or not they provide care directly, by thinking about the impact their decisions have on people. There are a number of ways to meet this standard, and below are examples of the attitudes and behaviours expected.

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacy professionals:

- obtain consent to provide care and pharmacy services
- involve, support and enable every person when making decisions about their health, care and wellbeing
- listen to the person and understand their needs and what matters to them
- give the person all relevant information in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions and choices
- consider the impact of their practice whether or not they provide care directly
- respect and safeguard the person’s dignity
- recognise and value diversity, and respect cultural differences – making sure that every person is treated fairly whatever their values and beliefs

- **recognise their own values and beliefs but do not impose them on other people**
- **take responsibility for ensuring that person-centred care is not compromised because of personal values and beliefs**
- make the best use of the resources available

This guidance is intended to:

- reflect the broad range of situations when a pharmacy professional’s religion, personal values or beliefs might impact on their willingness to provide certain services
- help pharmacy professionals understand what it means to take responsibility for ensuring that person-centred care is not compromised
- outline the key factors that pharmacy professionals should consider, to make sure people receive the care they need as a priority
- apply whether pharmacy professionals are working in a healthcare setting (such as a hospital, secure accommodation, care home, primary care or community pharmacy setting), another setting, or providing services in person or online

We have a **range of guidance** on our website to help pharmacy professionals apply our standards. As well as considering this guidance, all pharmacy professionals and pharmacy owners should read our guidance on confidentiality.

The legal framework

Pharmacy professionals must make sure that they keep up to date and comply with the law, and with any NHS or employment policies and contractual responsibilities of their employer that apply to their particular area of work.

In the context of religion, personal values and beliefs in pharmacy, it is important that pharmacy professionals understand and keep to the relevant framework of equalities and human rights legislation.

For example, the Equality Act 2010 protects individuals from direct and indirect discrimination, and harassment, because of nine 'protected characteristics'¹ including religion or belief. Protection applies in the workplace, the provision of services and other contexts, and is subject to defined exceptions.

We recognise that all protected characteristics have equal status. This guidance deals specifically with religion and belief as well as personal values, as these can particularly impact on professionals' decision-making in practice. It is also important to note that within equality law, religion means any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief means any religious or philosophical belief, and includes a lack of belief.

Also, the Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. Article 9 protects the right to freedom of

thought, conscience and religion. This right is subject to qualification and cannot be used to support an action that disproportionately infringes the rights and freedoms of others.

The legislation in this area is complex, and there is significant and developing case law on equalities and human rights issues. It is not for our standards or supporting guidance to set out the law in detail or give legal advice. This means that pharmacy professionals need to understand how the law applies to them and get legal advice when they need it.

Employers must also keep to the relevant employment, human rights and equalities law, and must not discriminate against pharmacy professionals because of their stated or perceived personal values or beliefs, including religion.

¹ The 'protected characteristics' are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.



1. Religion, personal values and beliefs in pharmacy

We recognise and respect that a pharmacy professional's religion, personal values and beliefs are often central to their lives and can make a positive contribution to their providing safe and effective care to a diverse population. It is important that pharmacy professionals take their own – and others – religion, personal values and beliefs into account when dealing with colleagues and people using pharmacy services, and understand how these have the potential to interact with and impact on the delivery of care.

In some cases, a pharmacy professional's religion, personal values or beliefs may influence their day-to-day practice, particularly whether they feel able to provide certain services. This might include, for example, services related to:

- contraception (routine or emergency)
- fertility medicines
- hormonal therapies
- mental health and wellbeing
- substance misuse
- sexual health

Pharmacy professionals have the right to practise in line with their religion, personal values or beliefs as long as they act in accordance with equalities and human rights law and make sure that person-centred care is not compromised.

Pharmacy professionals must not discriminate against a person based on their own – or the person's – religion, personal values or beliefs, or lack of religion or belief. They should be sensitive to cultural, social, religious and clinical factors,

and recognise that these can guide a person's choices.

It is important that pharmacy professionals work in partnership with their employers and colleagues to consider how they can practise in line with their religion, personal values and beliefs without compromising care. This includes thinking in advance about the areas of their practice which may be affected and making the necessary arrangements, so they do not find themselves in the position where a person's care could be compromised.

If a pharmacy professional is unwilling to provide a certain service, they should take steps to make sure the person asking for care is at the centre of their decision-making, so they can access the service they need in a timely manner and without hindrance. For example, this might include considering any time limits or other barriers to accessing medicines or other services, as well as any adverse impact on the person.

Pharmacy professionals should use their professional judgement when making decisions about what is clinically appropriate for the individual person, and discuss alternative options with the person, if necessary. Pharmacy professionals should keep in mind the difference between religion, personal values or beliefs, and a professional clinical judgement.

1.1 Taking responsibility

People receive safe and effective care when pharmacy professionals take responsibility for ensuring that person-centred care is not compromised by personal values or beliefs. The way this is done will depend on the individual

situation, and the specific needs and circumstances of the person asking for care.

We want to be clear that referral to another health professional may be an appropriate option, and this can include handover to another pharmacist at the same, or another, pharmacy or service provider.

Pharmacy professionals should use their professional judgement to decide whether a referral is appropriate in each individual situation, and take responsibility for the outcome of the person's care. This includes considering the impact of their decision on the person asking for care, and meeting their legal responsibilities.

There are a number of factors for pharmacy professionals to consider when deciding whether a referral is appropriate in the circumstances. In particular, pharmacy professionals should make sure:

- people receive the care they need as a priority
- people are provided with all the relevant information to help them access the care they need, and
- people are treated as individuals, fairly and with respect

A referral may not be appropriate in every situation: for example, if a service is not accessible or readily available elsewhere for the person, or if, due to the person's vulnerability, a referral would effectively obstruct timely access to the service. Again, pharmacy professionals should use their professional judgement to decide what is appropriate in individual cases, and keep a record of these decisions, including any discussions with the person asking for care.

2. Factors to consider

Below are some of the key factors that pharmacy professionals should think about when providing person-centred care. This includes situations when religion, personal values and beliefs might have an impact on their willingness to provide certain services.

2.1 Work location and range of services

Pharmacy professionals should use their professional judgement to make sure the person asking for care is able to receive or access the services they need. Pharmacy professionals should think in advance about the range of services they can provide, the roles they feel able to carry out, and how to handle requests for services sensitively.

Pharmacy professionals should not knowingly put themselves in a position where they are unwilling to deliver or arrange timely care for a person. They should consider whether this means that, in some cases, certain professional roles will not be appropriate for them.

Pharmacy professionals should also consider:

- the suitability of the location, environment and working hours of the role they choose to work in: for example, an isolated pharmacy in a rural area, or on an out-of-hours rota
- the full range and type of services which their pharmacy is contracted to provide, including whether these are provided regularly or occasionally, and
- whether they will be working on their own and are aware of other local pharmacy professionals who will be willing and able to provide the service if they feel unable to do so, and what the other service providers' opening hours are



2.2 Openness between the pharmacy professional and their employer

Pharmacy professionals should work in partnership with their employers and colleagues to create open and honest work environments. They should be open with their employer about any ways in which their religion, personal values or beliefs might impact on their willingness to provide certain pharmacy services.

Pharmacy professionals should also:

- tell their employer, as soon as possible, if their religion, personal values or beliefs might prevent them from providing certain pharmacy services, and
- work in partnership with their employer to make sure adequate and appropriate arrangements are put in place

2.3 Making the care of the person the priority

Pharmacy professionals have an important role in treating every person as an individual, adapting the care to meet their needs, and putting the person at the centre of their decision-making. They should:

- work with the person asking for care, and others that may need to be involved, so the person can come to an informed decision about how they can access the care and services they need
- understand the needs of the person and any specific barriers they may face
- identify the options available for the person, and not assume that the person knows about these

- check the person understands the full range of information, including any significant risks which may be associated with the care they are seeking or the pharmacy professional's recommendations, to make it as easy as possible for the person to receive care
- be open to having discussions about how the person's religion, personal values or beliefs might relate to their care: for example, by giving advice on taking medicines during periods of fasting or giving advice about supplying non-animal-based medicines, and
- recognise when a person may need extra care or advice – for example, a distressed or vulnerable person or in a matter involving safeguarding – and act when necessary

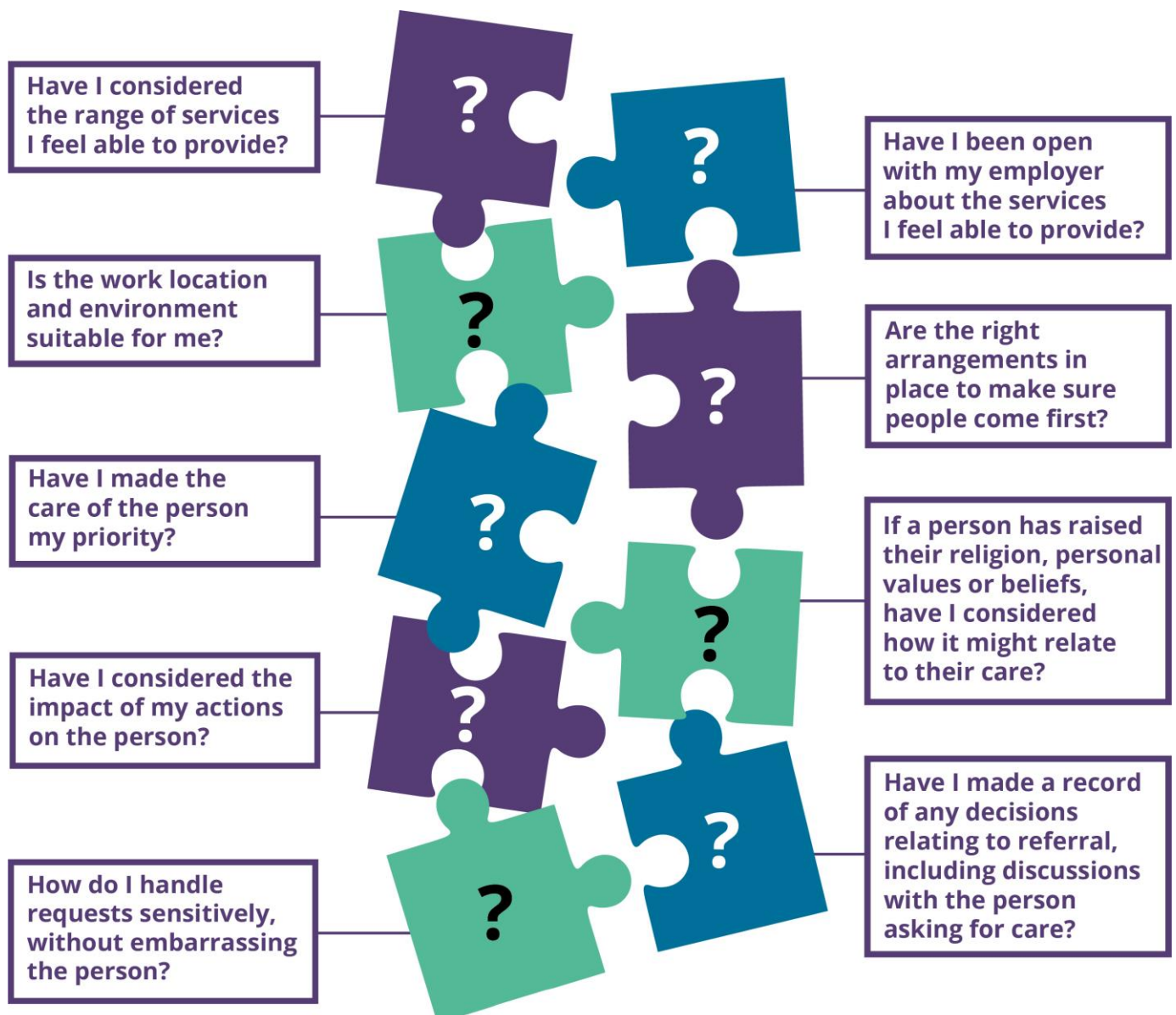
2.4 Handling requests sensitively

Pharmacy professionals should be sensitive in the way that they communicate with people asking for care and not imply or express disapproval or judgement. In handling requests, they should:

- make sure the person is treated sensitively by using appropriate facilities or arrangements, such as a consultation room if available
- communicate professionally and with respect
- adapt their communication to meet the needs of the person they are communicating with
- consider the appropriateness of their body language, tone of voice and words
- safeguard, respect and maintain the privacy, dignity and confidentiality of people asking for care, and make sure the person is not made to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or distressed

3. Questions to ask yourself

Below are some key questions that pharmacy professionals should ask themselves when thinking about how they can ensure and demonstrate that they have provided person-centred care in this context:





4. Employers and pharmacy professionals working together

Employers have important responsibilities for creating and maintaining a person-centred environment, and ensuring the safe and effective delivery of pharmacy services. This includes considering the needs of the people in their area and how the pharmacy can best meet their expectations and needs as a priority.

Also, employers have responsibilities towards pharmacy professionals and the wider pharmacy team. Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace, and employers should be sensitive to the religion, personal values and beliefs of pharmacy professionals, and create and maintain fair working environments. Employers must keep to the relevant employment, human rights and equalities law. They must not unlawfully discriminate against pharmacy professionals because of their stated or perceived religion, personal values or beliefs.

Employers must have governance and staff management processes in place so they can support and enable pharmacy professionals to provide continuous care in a non-discriminatory way for the people using their pharmacy services, throughout the opening hours of the pharmacy. They should consider and review these workplace processes to make sure that these are appropriate, and in line with the law.

Pharmacy professionals who are employed or seeking employment should have open and honest conversations with their employers about any ways in which their religion, personal values or beliefs might impact on their willingness to

provide certain pharmacy services. This will enable employers to put in place ways of working to ensure the consistent provision of services and compliance with their NHS contract. Pharmacy professionals should discuss with their employer any necessary arrangements that may be needed, so that the pharmacy services provided are not adversely affected by their personal values and beliefs.

The pharmacy team is often the first point of contact so employers should make sure that the team is aware of this guidance. Employers should also make sure the team understands the importance of treating people sensitively when they request a pharmacy service or care which may not be in line with their religion, personal values or beliefs, so that the person's care is not compromised.

There is a significant amount of advice and guidance available from other professional sources to help employers understand and apply the law in this area. This includes detailed information for employers on their responsibilities in the workplace, the rights of employees (including job applicants) and the rights of people who use pharmacy services.

Other sources of information

You can get more information and guidance from professional bodies, indemnity insurance providers, and from other independent bodies such as those listed below:

- ACAS – ***Religion or belief and the workplace***
- **Association of Pharmacy Technicians, UK**
- **Citizens Advice**
- **Equalities and Human Rights Commission**
- Equalities and Human Rights Commission
Religion or belief guidance for employers
- **Equalities and Human Rights Commission Scotland**
- **Equalities and Human Rights Commission Wales**
- **European Convention on Human Rights**
- **Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists**
- **National Pharmacy Association**
- **Royal Pharmaceutical Society**

Relevant legislation

- The **Equality Act 2010**
- The **Human Rights Act 1998**

If you have questions or comments about the content of this guidance, please contact our Policy and Standards Team:

**Policy and Standards Team
General Pharmaceutical Council
25 Canada Square
London
E14 5LQ**

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We have also produced guidance on other topics that you may find useful:

www.pharmacyregulation.org/standards/guidance



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