

Patient-centred professionalism in pharmacy

A review of the standards of conduct,
ethics and performance

Foreword

We believe that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians join the profession because they want to help patients and the public to manage and improve their health and wellbeing; and that the fulfillment they get from this drives them to do the work they do. We also believe that patients place their trust in pharmacy professionals. They trust that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be trained and qualified, will behave professionally, will do them no harm and in fact, quite the opposite – will help them to manage and improve their own health and wellbeing. In short, patients feel there is an unwritten ‘promise’ that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians make to them.

We want to have a conversation with patients, the users of pharmacy services and pharmacy professionals about what this ‘promise’ means in practice. What expectations do patients have? And what do all pharmacy professionals promise to do? What does it actually mean to be a professional and act professionally?

It is clear that the NHS and healthcare services are changing. Pharmacy professionals’ roles and their contributions to public health are growing, as are the public’s expectations, and there is every sign that this will continue for many years to come.

This presents a challenge, and if pharmacy professionals are to meet it we must all recognise that we have a role to play and a contribution to make.

We know that research¹ has been carried out in pharmacy, and in the wider healthcare world and beyond, about what professionalism means.

We want to build on this and understand what ‘patient-centred professionalism’ in pharmacy means.

¹ The University of Manchester, Centre for Pharmacy Workforce Studies, 2011. Patient-centred professionalism among newly registered pharmacists, go to: www.pharmacyresearchuk.org/waterway/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Patient_centred_professionalism_in_newly_registered_pharmacists.pdf

As well as being clear about what patient-centred professionalism means, it's important that we learn from previous failings in patient care and what led to these. The events at [Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust in England](#), the Vale of Leven in Scotland, and the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board hospitals in Port Talbot and Bridgend in Wales are all examples of where healthcare professions have failed patients and the public. They showed what happens when failures of management and governance are made worse by failures of professionalism.

We have committed to reviewing our core regulatory standards – the standards of conduct, ethics and performance which apply to every registered pharmacy professional, as well as every pre-registration trainee. We will use the outcomes of this discussion on patient-centred professionalism to help us review these standards. The standards are at the heart of what we do as a regulator. And if we get them right they will be one of the things that make patients and others confident that they are receiving care from professionals who are wholly focused on delivering patient-centred care.



Nigel Clarke
Chair



Duncan Rudkin
Chief executive and registrar

Patient-centred professionalism in pharmacy

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is committed to protecting, promoting and improving the health and safety of patients and people who use pharmacy services in England, Scotland and Wales. One of the main ways we do this is by setting the standards of professional practice.

Why we are publishing this paper

It has never been more important to have an honest and open conversation about what it means to be a pharmacy professional in the 21st century.

The three governments in England, Scotland and Wales have all stressed the valuable and important contribution that pharmacy professionals can and must make to the healthcare systems in Great Britain. We also know that the way pharmacy services are delivered is changing and evolving quickly.

This brings great opportunities for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, but also raises the expectations of patients and the people who use pharmacy services.

We believe that it is the decisions pharmacists and pharmacy technicians make in their day-to-day work which make the most significant and positive contribution to quality improvements in pharmacy and in managing risks to patients.

We know that the overwhelming majority of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are committed to giving the best care possible to their patients. We also know there is more and more pressure to provide good-quality services with reduced resources, and that this can be challenging.

We know that demonstrating professionalism is not always easy, but that doing so is fundamental to the care of patients and people who use pharmacy services. We also know that while the experience of the overwhelming majority of patients in pharmacy is positive, we cannot be complacent and not everyone who receives care will have this experience.

What the public has told us about their experiences

A recent survey² commissioned by the GPhC showed that most people in England, Scotland and Wales trust health advice from pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, although many still have more trust in GPs and other health professionals. When thinking about their last experience of a pharmacy, most respondents agreed that staff were knowledgeable and able to give them the information and advice they needed. And, crucially, staff treated them with respect. However, there are some differences in how the general public across the different countries feel about their pharmacy experience, and privacy was a cause for some concern.

We know that many people within pharmacy are finding new ways to support people and communities in managing and improving their health and wellbeing, and are working hard to deal with these issues. But we can also see evidence that the public are more and more willing to challenge poor services and care, and raise concerns when their expectations are not met.

What does patient-centred professionalism mean?

Professionalism is a word that we often hear regulators, professional bodies and governments using. Being a pharmacist or pharmacy technician is something to be proud of – but what does it actually mean to be ‘a professional’? Is it to act professionally? What is it that makes someone act professionally?

As trusted and competent healthcare professionals, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians act and behave professionally on a day-to-day basis. But saying exactly what it is that they do to behave in this way is perhaps harder.

In the same way, patients and people who use pharmacy services will know when they get good-quality care and when they have had care that falls short of their expectations. But what is it that makes the difference between these? Is it just one thing, or a combination of things?

We will work closely with professional leadership bodies. These have a fundamental role to play in helping us agree what patient-centred professionalism is.

To help us start this work, we want to hear from you. What does patient-centred professionalism mean to you – the pharmacist, the pharmacy technician, the patient, the person who uses pharmacy services, the employer, the organisation that represents pharmacy professionals?

“Someone who is professional is competent in their discipline, takes pride in their work and keeps up to date with what they need to know. Someone who is patient centred always puts the interests of their patients and especially their safety first; listens to their patients; and is responsive to their needs and preferences.”

Peter Walsh, Chief Executive, Action Against Medical Accidents

² Ipsos MORI, 2015. *Public perceptions of pharmacies*, go to: www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/gphc_public_perceptions_report_-_final.pdf

How the shared view of patient-centred professionalism will be used

By the GPhC:

We will use the shared view of patient-centred professionalism in all our regulatory work, as part of:

- setting education and training standards
- deciding on the content of our standards of professional practice
- future developments on continuing fitness to practise
- how we make decisions about concerns we receive
- the way we communicate with pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, patients and people who use pharmacy services, as well as with our stakeholders

We will use the shared vision immediately to develop our standards of professional practice. They will set out the expectations of patients and users of pharmacy services, as well as those of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. In turn, our standards can be used:

- **By patients and people who use pharmacy services**
The standards should tell patients what they can expect from pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, and should help them to know when they receive care that may have fallen short of these standards.
- **By pharmacists and pharmacy technicians**
The standards are used by pharmacy professionals to help them make decisions. The standards will tell pharmacists and pharmacy technicians what standards are expected of them and should guide them in their day-to-day practice.

A review of the standards of professional practice

This will take us through to 2016. This discussion paper will help us:

- find out what is important to our stakeholders when they talk and think about patient-centred professionalism in pharmacy, and
- consider how this professionalism can be focused on the needs and hopes of patients and people who use pharmacy services

Responses to this paper will help us define the essential features of patient-centred professional practice in pharmacy. This will, in turn, help us draft revised standards.

The present version of the standards of conduct, ethics and performance was first produced in June 2010. It will stay in force until the new version of the standards is consulted on, agreed by council and formally launched.

“A professional should always act in the best interests of a patient or member of the public. Even with non-patient facing roles the purpose of what they do must be to ensure it is in the best interests of the public and patients. Acting as a professional is about maintaining expertise and developing additional knowledge and capability to improve the breadth and depth of personal expertise. It is always starting with thinking about the needs of the public and patients. It is acting with due care and attention. It is knowing the limits of personal competency but being then able to support individuals in where they can go for further support and information. It is behaving in a manner that would be viewed well by peers and the public. It is about being compassionate and helping people to navigate the complexity that is their personal care.”

Ash Soni, President, Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Patient-centred professionalism in pharmacy

We would like to hear what professionalism means to you.

- **What characteristics does someone who is professional demonstrate?**
- **What characteristics does someone who is patient-centred demonstrate?**

Example

Professionalism: effective communication, involving patients in decisions about their care

Patient-centred: having conversations with patients that are tailored to their needs and their preferences, not using a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to communication, taking every opportunity to make sure a pharmacist or pharmacy technician talks to a patient about their medication

"APTUK encourages in our membership, and in all pharmacy technicians, the attitudes, behaviours and qualities that are associated with outstanding healthcare professionals and we are keen to play our part in this important conversation about patient-centred professionalism.

For us, characteristics demonstrated by professionals include acting with integrity, being accountable and ultimately showing respect for others. We believe that patient-centred care is about an equal partnership with the patient that can be delivered by the pharmacy professional using clear and appropriate language and communication. It is also about treating the patient with dignity; being kind, polite, compassionate and above all considering the patient's point of view, choices and lifestyle."

Tess Fenn, President, Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK

Demonstrating professionalism – examples

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians demonstrate professionalism every day. In most situations, this will happen because it is a natural way to behave for pharmacy professionals.

However, there may be times when demonstrating professionalism can be harder. The pharmacist or pharmacy technician may need to work out what the 'right thing to do' is when facing competing priorities in a difficult situation which has no obvious 'best answer'. Demonstrating professionalism can also be influenced by the environment the pharmacist and pharmacy technician work in, and by the need to balance competing interests.

Managing complicated situations each day is one of the great challenges and privileges of being a professional. It is precisely because there are no easy answers that the public need pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to be professional.

- **We would like to hear about situations you have been in or seen, when you think pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have acted professionally or been patient-centred. What went well in those situations?**
- **We would like to hear about situations you have been in or seen, when you do not think that pharmacists or pharmacy technicians have acted professionally or been patient-centred. What do you think could have been done to improve on what you saw?**

Demonstrating professionalism – ‘barriers’ and ‘enablers’

Demonstrating professionalism can be affected by a number of things. Understanding these is important, so that the GPhC, professional bodies, other organisations and employers can provide the support and environment needed for professionalism to flourish.

Barriers to demonstrating professionalism are the things that stop, stand in the way of or stifle the pharmacist’s or pharmacy technician’s ability to behave professionally. **Enablers** are the opposite of this, and are the things that encourage or help the pharmacist or pharmacy technician to act professionally.

Some things could act as either a barrier or an enabler, for example: the working environment, experience, confidence, or education and training.

- **What are the barriers and enablers to pharmacists and pharmacy technicians demonstrating professionalism and being patient-centred?**

Letting us know your views

We want to hear from our stakeholders such as pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, pharmacy students, patients, people who use pharmacy services, members of the public, and organisations representing patients.

We welcome your views on any of the issues raised in this paper. In particular, we would like your answers to these questions:

- **What characteristics does someone who is professional demonstrate?**
- **What characteristics does someone who is patient-centred demonstrate?**
- **We would like to hear about situations you have been in or seen, when you think pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have acted professionally or been patient-centred. What went well in those situations?**
- **We would like to hear about situations you have been in or seen, when you do not think that pharmacists or pharmacy technicians have acted professionally or been patient-centred. What do you think could have been done to improve on what you saw?**
- **What are the barriers and enablers to pharmacists and pharmacy technicians demonstrating professionalism and being patient-centred?**

Next steps

Your responses to this document will help us define the essential features of patient-centred professionalism in pharmacy. This will, in turn, help us draft revised standards. We will carry out a public consultation on these at a later date.

Please tell us your views at www.pharmacyregulation.org/professionalism by **Friday 26 June 2015**.

You can also join the discussion on Twitter by using the hashtag **professionalism4patients**

General Pharmaceutical Council

**25 Canada Square,
London
E14 5LQ**


T: 020 3713 8000

W: pharmacyregulation.org

E: info@pharmacyregulation.org

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