Consultation on a code of conduct for students and fitness to practise procedures in schools of pharmacy

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has launched consultations on a code of conduct for pharmacy students and on fitness-to-practise procedures in schools of pharmacy. In this article, Damian Day, the Society’s head of accreditation, introduces the consultations.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is consulting on two new documents: “Code of conduct for pharmacy students” and “Fitness to practise procedures in schools of pharmacy”. The code of conduct sets out the expectations of students studying in schools of pharmacy and is similar in structure to the Society’s Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians. In fact it is based on the same seven principles. The code of conduct is intended to be a working document for students. The fitness-to-practise document is meant to be a guide to constructing fitness-to-practise procedures in schools and is aimed primarily at staff in universities with schools of pharmacy. The two documents are designed to be complementary but have different purposes and audiences.

This article deals with the code of conduct for pharmacy students, which is reproduced in the Panel on p626. The document relating to the fitness to practise procedures in schools of pharmacy document must be downloaded from the “current developments” section of the “world of pharmacy” page at the Society’s website (www.rpsgb.org). Alternatively, copies may be requested by telephoning 020 7572 2604 or e-mailing educationconsultations@rpsgb.org.

Students’ code

The introduction to the code of conduct for pharmacy students says: “Your pharmacy course is preparing you to enter a profession. Pharmacy is one of the registered healthcare professions, and carries both privileges and responsibilities. As a pharmacy student you must demonstrate you are able to exercise those privileges and bear those responsibilities. This means you must conduct yourself professionally at all times. This code of conduct for pharmacy students (called the code of conduct in the rest of this document) applies to you from the first day of your course to the day you graduate. Remember that wherever you are, you are representing the profession of pharmacy and your university.

“Pharmacists registered with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain must abide by its Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians. When you become a pharmacist it will apply to you. It is based on seven principles; each one is explained by a number of examples; others will arise when you are working as a pharmacist. Applying the seven principles is central to the way you conduct yourself and what being a professional is about. All the principles are equally important.

“T his code of conduct is based on the same seven principles as those in the Society’s code of ethics and the code of conduct explains how the principles apply to you as a student. It will help you as you develop your understanding of what it is to be a pharmacist. The code of conduct indicates how the principles apply to you now and shows what is expected of you during your time as a student.

“T is a requirement that your school has fitness to practise procedures for pharmacy students. If you do not abide by the code of conduct you may be subject to those procedures.

How to respond to the consultation

By post: Go to www.rpsgb.org/worldofpharmacy/currentdevelopmentsinpharmacy/consultations/ and download the documents. Alternatively, telephone 020 7572 2604 or e-mail educationconsultations@rpsgb.org for copies to be sent. Post the completed questionnaire to Education Consultations, Philippa Strevens, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN.

Comments must be received no later than 19 June 2009.
"This code of conduct is for students studying on MPharms, Overseas Pharmacists' Assessment Programmes (O SPAPs) and foundation degrees in pharmacy."

**Consultation questions**

The consultation documents pose a number of questions. Questions relating to the code of conduct for pharmacy students include:

- Do you think the purpose and status of the code of conduct is clear?
- Do you think it is easy to understand?
- Do you think the Royal Pharmaceutical Society was right to use the same seven principles as those in its Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians as the basis of the code of conduct?
- Does anything else need to be added to the code of conduct or changed?
- How can we support the implementation of the code of conduct?

Those relating to fitness to practise procedures in schools of pharmacy include:

- Do you think the purpose and status of the document is clear?
- Do you think the fitness to practise procedures guidelines are clear?
- Does anything else need to be added to the document or changed?
- How can we support the implementation of the document?

Readers of The Pharmaceutical Journal and other interested parties are invited to respond to these consultation. Comments must be received by 19 June 2009.

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**Draft code of conduct for pharmacy students**

1. **Make the care of patients your first concern**
   - The health, well-being and safety of patients must be your main concern. To support this, you will learn about the design and development of medicines and their safe and effective use. Even when you are not in direct contact with patients, you will be developing values, attitudes, knowledge and skills that you will use as a pharmacist. As a student you must:
     - Always bear in mind your future role as a pharmacist when studying: this applies equally to the science elements of the course as to pharmacy practice
     - Apply your learning to ensure you know how to develop and use medicines for the maximum benefit of patients
     - Promote the health of patients

2. **Exercise your professional judgement in the interests of patients and the public**
   - You will need to exercise professional judgement at all times: your course is designed to help you understand what this means. As a student you must:
     - Consider and act in the best interests of patients and the public
     - Ensure your beliefs do not compromise patient care
     - Make sure your judgement is not influenced by personal interests
     - Be prepared to challenge the judgement of others if you have reason to believe that their decisions could compromise safety or care

3. **Show respect for others**
   - Demonstrating respect for the dignity, views and rights of others is fundamental in forming and maintaining appropriate professional relationships with patients, carers, colleagues and other individuals with whom you come into contact. As a student you must:
     - Recognise diversity and respect the cultural differences, values and beliefs of others, including students and staff
     - Treat others politely, considerately and with respect
     - Listen to, and respect, others' opinions and be non-judgemental in your attitude
     - Maintain proper professional boundaries in the relationships you have with others, especially with vulnerable adults and children
     - Recognise and respect the rights of patients
     - Respect patient confidentiality and consent, but disclose relevant information as required

4. **Encourage patients to participate in decisions about their care**
   - Patients have the right to be involved in decisions about their treatment and care. Pharmacists must respect this right and help patients to take part in decisions which affect their health and well-being. As a student you must:
     - Learn how to listen to patients and their carers and communicate effectively with them in a way they can understand
     - Learn how to give patients information and advice so they can take part in decisions about their care, including recognising their right to refuse care
     - Learn how to work in partnership with patients, their carers and others to manage a patient's treatment and care

5. **Develop your professional knowledge and competence**
   - At all stages of your pharmacy career you must take responsibility for ensuring your knowledge and skills are up-to-date and that you maintain your competence. As a student you must:
     - Reflect on and develop your professional knowledge and competence throughout your course
     - Recognise and stay within the limits of your competence
     - Make rational and informed decisions
     - Engage constructively with assessments, which are an opportunity to reflect on your learning
     - Ensure you are aware of the continuing professional development requirements for pharmacists

6. **Be honest and trustworthy**
   - The public trust healthcare professionals, like all healthcare professionals, must take responsibility for their work. As a student you must:
     - Obey the law and comply with this Code of Conduct
     - Take responsibility for your learning and your actions and work constructively with others
     - Take responsibility for your own health, especially if it may impact negatively on other people
     - Tell your university only if there is anything that could impair your ability to study
     - Ask for help when you need it and respond appropriately
     - Plan and use your time effectively
     - Follow dress codes
     - Attend classes and conduct yourself appropriately
     - Be punctual
     - Be contactable
     - Ensure you have adequate English language skills
     - Abide by health and safety requirements

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**The seven principles**

1. Make the care of patients your first concern
2. Exercise your professional judgement in the interests of patients and the public
3. Show respect for others
4. Encourage patients to participate in decisions about their care
5. Develop your professional knowledge and competence
6. Be honest and trustworthy
7. Take responsibility for your working practices

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**Act with honesty and integrity**

- Honour your commitments and take responsibility for your work
- Not plagiarise the work of others
- Use research and laboratory data honestly and ethically, seeking permission to use data as required
- Supply accurate information on request and update information as necessary
- Respond honestly, openly and courteously to complaints and criticisms concerning yourself or others
- Co-operate with formal investigations about you or others
- Abide by the rules and regulations of your university and other organisations linked to your studies

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**Take responsibility for your working practices**

- Pharmacists, like all healthcare professionals, must take responsibility for their work. As a student you must:
  - Obey the law and comply with this Code of Conduct
  - Take responsibility for your learning and your actions and work constructively with others
  - Take responsibility for your own health, especially if it may impact negatively on other people
  - Tell your university only if there is anything that could impair your ability to study
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  - Be contactable
  - Ensure you have adequate English language skills
  - Abide by health and safety requirements

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