



# CODE OF PRACTICE

For Physician Assistant  
Practitioners in Australia



! ! !

Effective from September 2011  
Version 1

[illegible]

Copyright enquiries about this publication should be directed to the Secretary, ASPA Inc. by email to [secretary@aspa-australianpas.org](mailto:secretary@aspa-australianpas.org) or in writing to the above postal address.

!

! !

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction   | 1  |
| Purpose of the Code  | 2  |
| 1 Professional values and qualities of a Physician Assistant | 3  |
| 2 Physician Assistant – Medical Practitioner Relationship    | 4  |
| 3 Providing excellent patient care                           | 5  |
| 4 Maintaining a high level of medical competence             | 6  |
| 4.1 Understanding cultural needs                             | 7  |
| 5 Maintaining professional performance                       | 8  |
| 6 Confidentiality, privacy and informed consent              | 9  |
| 6.1 Informed consent   | 9  |
| 7 Minimising Risks   | 10 |
| 8 In the case of adverse events                              | 11 |
| 9 Complaints   | 12 |
| 10 Insurance   | 12 |
| 11 Working with other health care professionals              | 13 |
| 12 Patient – Physician Assistant relationship                | 14 |
| 13 Public Health   | 15 |
| Acceptance   | 15 |
| Acknowledgements   | 16 |

!

!

!

!

!

# INTRODUCTION

The Code of Practice describes what is expected of all Physician Assistants (PA) registered to practise in Australia. The Code sets out the principles that characterise good medical practice and makes explicit the standards of ethical and professional conduct expected of PA's by their professional peers and the community.

The code is addressed to PA's and is also intended to let the community know what they can expect from Physician Assistants working in Australia. The application of the Code will vary according to individual circumstances, but the principles should not be compromised.

This Code of Practice does not set new standards. It brings together, standards that have long been at the core of medical practice.

The practice of medicine is challenging and rewarding. No Code or guidelines can ever encompass every situation or replace the insight and professional judgment of proficient Physician Assistants.

Sound medical practice relates to using this judgment in a way that would meet the standards expected of you by your peers and the community.

## PURPOSE OF THE CODE

The Code describes what is expected of all Physician Assistants (PA) registered to practise medicine independently under the delegation of a registered Medical Practitioner in Australia.

It identifies the fundamental professional and moral commitments of the profession. It sets out the principles that characterise excellent medical practice and makes explicit the standards of ethical and professional conduct expected of Physician Assistants (PA) by their professional peers and the community.

Anja Michel PA developed the Code in conjunction with the Australian Society of Physician Assistant Inc (ASPA).

This Code is not a substitute for the provisions of legislation and case law. If there is any conflict between this Code and the law, the law takes priority.

This Code is not an exhaustive study of medical ethics or an ethics textbook. It does not address in detail the standards of practice within particular disciplines.

While good medical practice respects patients' rights, this Code is not a charter of rights.

## ! 1 Professional values and qualities of a Physician Assistant

While individual Physician Assistants (PAs) have their own personal beliefs and values, there are certain professional values on which all PAs are expected to base their practice:

PAs have a duty to make the care of patients their first priority and to practice medicine safely, effectively and be patient centered

They must be trustworthy, display the highest ethical standards and never take advantage of patients

They must display qualities such as integrity, truthfulness, dependability and compassion

PAs must protect the patients confidentiality

PAs should act in a manner which reflects well on the profession

PAs have the responsibility to protect and promote the health of individuals and the community

PAs must understand that each patient is unique and work in partnership with them, adapting what they do to address the needs and reasonable expectations of each patient

PAs must have cultural awareness and acknowledge the diversity in a contemporary Australian society

Medical care for any individual or group should not be compromised because of ethnicity; culture; aboriginality; gender; spiritual values; sexual orientation; disability; age; economic, social or health status; or any other grounds (perceived or realised)

PAs should recognise that cultural differences may impact on the PA-Patient relationship and on the delivery of health services

PAs are expected to reflect regularly on whether they are practicing effectively; on what is happening in their interpersonal relationships with patients and colleagues; and on their own health and wellbeing

PAs have a duty to keep their skills and knowledge up to date; to refine and develop their clinical judgment as they gain experience; and to contribute to their profession positively

PAs are will always be considerate to relatives, carers, partners and others close to the patient, as well as being respectful of their role in the care of the patient

## 2 Physician Assistant – Medical Practitioner Relationship

PAs are mid-level medical practitioners who are able to practice medicine under the auspices of a registered Medical Practitioner. The relationship between a PA and the delegating medical practitioner is one of mutual trust and respect.

The Physician Assistant is a representative of the delegating Medical practitioner, treating the patient in the style and manner developed and directed by the delegating Medical officer.

Both professionals practice as members of a medical team. The registered Medical practitioner has complete responsibility for the care of the patient and PAs share that responsibility with their delegating medical officer.

The Registered Medical practitioner is responsible for clarifying and familiarizing the PA with his supervising methods and style of delegating patient care

The extent of the involvement by the PA in the assessment and implementation of treatment will depend on the complexity and acuity of the patient's condition and the training, experience and preparation of the Physician Assistant as adjudged by the delegating Medical practitioner

Although the registered Medical practitioner need not be present during the time the PA performs his or her duties, there must be a method of contact between the delegating medical officer and the PA *in place* at all time, which can be phone, fax or email.

The PA must be competent in the duties he or she is performing and the registered medical practitioner with whom the PA is employed must also be licensed and trained to perform the relevant duties

The registered medical officer and PA together should review all delegated patient services on a regular basis, as well as the mutually agreed upon guidelines for practice

!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!



### 3 Providing excellent patient care

In clinical practice, the care of patients is the PAs *primary concern*. Providing excellent patient care includes:

Assessing the patient, taking into account the history; the patient's views; and an appropriate physical examination. The history includes relevant psychological, social and cultural aspects

Formulating and implementing a suitable management plan (including arranging investigations and providing treatment and advice)

Facilitating coordination and continuity of care

Referring a patient to another practitioner when this is in the patient's best interests

Recognising and respecting patients' rights to make their own informed decisions

PAs have the right to refuse to participate or conduct procedures delegated by their employing medical officer, which would violate their reasoned moral conscience. In doing so, they must take all reasonable steps to ensure that quality of care and patient safety is not compromised

PAs must be able to adapt their practice to improve patient engagement and health outcomes





## 4 Maintaining a high level of medical competence

A high level of medical competence and professional conduct is essential for excellent patient care. This involves:

Recognising and working within the limits of your competence and scope of practice

Ensuring that you have adequate knowledge and skills to provide safe clinical care

PAs must practice in accordance with the authorizing registered Medical practitioner

PAs define their scope of practice according to current knowledge, competency standards and delegation of their delegating Medical practitioner; they should practice in a careful, honest and accountable manner and shall accept responsibility for the application of sound judgement

PAs must keep a confidential record for every patient to allow for the effective evaluation of the patients' progress and the PAs/Doctors practice

Considering the balance of benefit and harm in all clinical-management decisions

Providing treatment options based on the best available information

Taking steps to alleviate patient symptoms and distress, whether or not a cure is possible

Support the patients' right to seek a second opinion

Consulting and taking advice from the delegating Medical practitioner and colleagues, when appropriate

Making responsible and effective use of the resources available

Encouraging patients to take an interest in, and responsibility for, the management of their health, and supporting them in this endeavour

Ensuring that personal views do not adversely affect the care of patients

!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!

## 4.1 Understanding cultural needs

Excellent medical practice involves genuine effort to understand the cultural needs and contexts of different patients to obtain good health outcomes. This includes:

Having knowledge of, respect for and sensitivity towards, the cultural needs of the community PAs serve, including those of the indigenous Australians

Acknowledging the social, economic, cultural and behavioural factors influencing health, both at individual and population levels

Understanding that a PAs own culture and beliefs may influence interactions with patients

## 5 Maintaining professional performance

Maintaining and developing the knowledge, skills and professional behaviour are core aspects of excellent medical practice. This requires self-reflection and participation in relevant professional development, practice improvement and performance-appraisal processes to continually develop professional capabilities.

These activities must continue throughout the working life, as science and technology develop and society changes. PAs are therefore requested to:

## Keep medical knowledge and skills up to date

Participating regularly in activities that maintain and further develop the knowledge, skills and performance of the PA

Ensuring that the practice meets the standards that would be reasonably expected by the public and other health professionals

Regularly reviewing the continuing medical education and continuing professional development activities to ensure that they are consistent with those recommended by the professional organisation and regulatory authorities

Ensuring that the personal continuing professional development program includes self-directed and practice-based learning

PAs should have a full understanding of all the laws and regulations relevant to the practice as a mid-level health care provider

!!!!!!!!!!!!

## 6 Confidentiality, privacy and informed consent

Patients have a right to expect that PAs and their delegating Medical practitioner will hold information about them in *confidence*, unless the release of information is required by law or public interest considerations. In the clinical setting this encompasses:

Treating information about patients as confidential

Appropriately sharing information about patients for their health care, consistent with privacy law and professional guidelines about confidentiality

Being aware that there are complex issues related to genetic information and seeking appropriate advice about disclosure of such information

!

### 6.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a person's voluntary decision about medical care that is made with the knowledge and understanding of the benefits and risks involved.

The information that PAs need to give to patients is detailed in guidelines issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council Reference.

Providing information to patients in a way that they can understand before asking for their consent. If necessary asking the patient to repeat the information given in their own words

PAs need to obtain informed consent or other valid authority before any examination, investigation or provision of treatment (except in an emergency), or before involving patients in teaching and research

Ensuring that the patients are informed about fees and charges

When referring a patient for investigation or treatment, advising the patient that there may be additional costs, which patients may wish to clarify before proceeding

PAs need to be aware of additional responsibilities when caring for children and ensure that they consider young people's capacity for decision making and consent

Provided information to children must be in a way that they can understand and comprehend

PAs need to recognise the role of parents and caregivers, and when appropriate, encourage the young person to involve their parents and/or caregivers in decisions about their care

!  
!

## !

Being aware of the importance of the principles of open disclosure and a non-punitive approach to incident management

Participating in systems for surveillance and monitoring of adverse events and 'near misses', including reporting such events

Taking all reasonable steps to address the issue if a patient's safety may be compromised

Taking appropriate steps to assist a colleague to receive help if there are concerns about his/her performance or ability to practice

[illegible]

## 8 In the case of adverse events

When adverse events occur, PAs have the responsibility to be open and honest in their communication with the patient and to review what has occurred, reporting appropriately.

When something goes wrong, a PA must show the following qualities:

## Recognising what has happened

Acting immediately to rectify the problem and where possible, seeking any necessary help and advice from their delegating Medical officer

Explaining to the patient as promptly and fully as possible what has happened and the anticipated short-term and long-term consequences

Acknowledging any patient distress and providing appropriate support

Complying with any relevant policies, procedures and reporting requirements (subject to advice from the medical indemnity insurer)

## Reviewing adverse events and implementing changes to reduce the risk of recurrence

## Reporting adverse events and implementing changes to reduce the risk of recurrence

## Ensuring patients have access to information about the processes for making a complaint

! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !

!

## 9 Complaints

Patients who are dissatisfied have a right to complain about the care they received. Details on how a patient can lodge a complaint can be found in the complaints procedure.

When a complaint is made, PAs must act accordingly:

Acknowledging the patients' right to complain

Working with the patient to resolve the issue, where possible

Providing a prompt, open and constructive response, including an explanation – and where appropriate, an apology

Ensuring the complaint does not adversely affect the patient's care. In some cases, it may be advisable to refer the patient to another PA or registered Medical practitioner

Complying with relevant complaints law, policies and procedures

!

## 10 Insurance

Physician Assistants have a professional obligation to ensure that they are appropriately covered by professional indemnity insurance. PAs can be covered in two ways:

The Physician Assistant is covered by their employer's liability insurance

The Physician Assistant is covered by their own, pre-arranged insurance

!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!





## 12 Patient – Physician Assistant Relationship

The basis for a cohesive Patient-PA relationship requires high standards of professional conduct on behalf of the Physician Assistant. This involves:

Being courteous, respectful, compassionate and honest

Maintaining professional boundaries

Listening to patients, asking for and respecting their views about their health and responding to their concerns and preferences

Treating each patient as an individual

Protecting patients' privacy and right to confidentiality, unless release of information is required by law or by public-interest considerations

Encouraging and supporting patients to be well informed about their health and to use this information wisely when they are making decisions

Encouraging and supporting patients, and where relevant, their carer or family, in caring for themselves and managing their own health

Recognising that there is a power imbalance in the PA-Patient relationship and not exploiting patients physically, emotionally, sexually or financially

A PA must never use their professional position to establish or pursue a sexual, exploitative or other inappropriate relationship with anybody under their care. This includes those close to the patient, such as their carer, guardian or spouse, or the parent or a child patient

PAs must avoid expressing his/her personal beliefs to patients in a manner that exploits their vulnerability or that is likely to cause the patient distress

If ineffective care or compromising circumstances cause a decrease in excellent care, PAs may need to end the professional relationship. PAs then may discuss this with their delegating Medical officer, ensuring that the patient is adequately informed of the decision and facilitating arrangements for the continuing care of the patient, including passing on relevant clinical information

Whenever possible, PAs should avoid providing medical care to anyone with whom they have a close personal relationship. This is inappropriate because of the lack of objectivity

!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!  
!

## 13 Public Health

PAs have a responsibility to promote the health of the community through disease prevention and control, and education and screening. In practice this involves:

Understanding the principles of public health, including health education, health promotion, disease prevention and control and screening

Participating in efforts to promote the health of the community and being aware of the obligations in disease prevention, screening and reporting notifiable diseases

PAs should recognise that the social environment in which a person resides has an impact on their health, and in collaboration with other health professionals and consumers, initiate and support action to meet the health and social needs of the public

### Acceptance of undertaking this Code of Practice

I, the undersigned, accept and abide by the principles outlined within this Code of Practice for Physician Assistant Practitioners working in Australia.

---

Name (printed in full)

---

Signed

---

Dated

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Australian Society of Physician Assistants Incorporated (ASPA) acknowledges the work of all individuals and organizations involved in the development of the Code of Practice for Physician Assistant Practitioners working in Australia.

We are grateful to a number of individuals and organizations who contributed substantially to the final Code by making submissions and providing feedback during the consultation process.

In particular we thank:

Anja Michel PA

*Anja is a Physician Assistant from the first cohort of qualified PAs in Australia. A big thanks for all her hard work.*



© ASPA Inc

*24 The Esplanade. Toolakea, Qld. 4818*

[www.aspa-australianpas.org](http://www.aspa-australianpas.org)

[info@aspa-australianpas.org](mailto:info@aspa-australianpas.org)