

New Zealand Physician Associate Society (NZPAS) Professional Standards and Code of Conduct for Physician Associates in New Zealand

Setting standards of clinical, and cultural competence and ethical conduct for physician associates (PA) is the primary focus of the New Zealand Physician Associate Society (NZPAS). Our current standards set the principles and values that define good medical practice and outline what to expect from all physician associates in all aspects of their professional behavior. These standards are based on standards already well established by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Canada in addition to medical practitioner standards from Medical Council New Zealand

The NZPAS follows these international standards as well as the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumer Rights as part of Manatu Hauora's Non-Regulated Health Professions guidelines under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act).

The successful physician associate pilot set the stage for the beginnings of the profession in New Zealand in 2012 by assessing its “fit for practice”. Since then, the New Zealand

Physician Associate Society (NZPAS) has developed and follows guidelines in conjunction with guidance from the Ministry of Health with strict utilization of the professions' international standards. This will continue until regulation is implemented and a regulatory authority assumes this responsibility.

Every PA practicing in the country works under a close supervisory relationship with a New Zealand Registered medical professional and the PA's scope of practice "mirrors" the supervising medical practitioner's scope of practice. Like all other regulated healthcare professionals, the physician associate is responsible for their own practice, although they will always work under the supervision of a designated senior medical practitioner, and the medical consultant or general practitioner will retain ultimate responsibility for the clinical management of the patient. Their detailed scope of practice in each setting is circumscribed by that of the supervising doctor. Although there may be circumstances when the supervising doctor is not physically present, they will always be readily available for consultation.

Currently in New Zealand there is no statutory regulation governing PAs. The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 set down the principles to ensure due process that would allow for future health professions to

achieve statutory regulation in New Zealand. The application for regulation of Physician Associates in New Zealand is currently progressing through the prescribed process with the Ministry of Health Regulatory Services.

Currently there is a managed voluntary register for PAs held by the New Zealand Physician Associate Society which was established by the NZPAS Board of Directors in 2017. This mimics other NZ regulatory bodies but has no force of law.

The managed voluntary register has a code of conduct to ensure good standards of practice and public protection and safety. In conjunction with the register, this document aims to set out the guiding ethical and moral principles and values that physician associates are expected to apply in their daily practice, until statutory regulation is achieved. PAs are responsible for familiarising themselves with this guidance and must use their best judgement in applying these principles in the various situations they may face. Failure to do so may bring their conduct into question and endanger their right to practise. This document is based upon the Medical Council of New Zealand's General Medical Practice (2021) as well as the Faculty of Physician Associates of the Royal College of Physicians Code of Conduct from the UK. Upon Regulation, the guidelines may be superseded by the Regulator's requirements.

These guiding principles aim to ensure that all PAs working in New Zealand will be:

- Safe practitioners working in a wide variety of clinical settings within their scope of practice and under agreed supervision.
- Expert communicators who are empathetic in a manner appropriate to a healthcare profession.
- Aware of health inequalities and the challenges of working in a multicultural environment, with patients from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds
- Aware of the limits of their competence and determined to act within those limits.
- Comfortable working in the context of a multiprofessional team environment
- Adept in the use of communication and information technology (C&IT) skills for healthcare
- Capable and motivated lifelong learners who are continually engaged in active professional development.
- Understanding of the need to maintain and promote health, as well as to cure or palliate disease, and aware

of their obligations to the wider community as well as to individuals.

- Trained to integrate theoretical and clinical learning.

This guidance cannot cover every situation and is by no means exhaustive. PAs may seek appropriate guidance from other sources, for example, legal counsel, supervising doctors or other trusted colleagues.

Scope of practice

PAs are educated in the medical model and work as members of the healthcare and more specifically the medical team. The boundaries of each PA's scope of practice are determined by their education and experience as well as their supervising doctor's scope of practice.

Education and Experience

PAs will complete a degree-level academic programme of no less than 90 weeks, preferably followed by a set period, initially requiring closer supervision for a newly qualified PA, in an appropriate clinical setting. This foundation will enable PAs to practise as part of the clinical team, within a range of primary and secondary healthcare settings.

A PA can:

- Formulate and document a detailed differential diagnosis, having taken a history and completed a physical examination.
- Develop a comprehensive patient management plan in the light of individual characteristics, background, and circumstances of the patient, and maintain and deliver the clinical

management of the patient on behalf of the supervising doctor while the patient travels through a complete episode of care.

- Perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and prescribe medications (subject to the oversight of their supervising doctor and necessary legislation)
- Request and interpret diagnostic studies (subject to the oversight of their supervising doctor) and undertake patient education, counselling, and health promotion.

Professionalism in action

1 Patients need good PAs. Good PAs make the care of patients their first concern: they are competent, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, establish and maintain good relationships with patients and colleagues, * are honest and trustworthy, and act with integrity and within the law.

* Colleagues include anyone a PA works with, PAs or otherwise.

2 Good PAs work in partnership with patients and respect their rights to privacy and dignity. They treat each patient as an individual. Aim to establish a relationship of trust with each of your patients. They do their best to make sure all patients receive good care and treatment that will support them to live as well as possible, whatever their illness or disability.

Be aware of cultural safety and diversity, and function effectively and respectfully when working with and treating people of different cultural backgrounds.

Treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity by:

- treating them with respect
- respecting their right to confidentiality and privacy.

3 The PA code of conduct describes what is expected of all physician associates registered with NZPAS. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the PA code of conduct and to follow the guidance it contains.

4 You must use your judgement in applying the principles to the various situations you will face as a PA, whatever field of medicine you work in, and whether you routinely see patients. You must be prepared to explain and justify your decisions and actions.

5 In this guidance, the terms ‘you must’ and ‘you should’ are used in the following ways:

- ‘You must’ is used for an overriding duty or principle.
- ‘You should’ is used when providing an explanation of how you will meet the overriding duty.
- ‘You should’ is also used where the duty or principle will not apply in all situations or circumstances, or where there are factors outside your control that affect whether or how you can follow the guidance.

6 To maintain your registration on the NZPAS Volunteer Register, you must demonstrate through the recertification process from your home country that you work in line with the principles and values set out in this guidance. Serious or persistent failure to follow this guidance will put your registration on the Volunteer Registry at risk.

Knowledge, skills, and performance

Develop and maintain your professional performance.

7 You must be competent in all aspects of your work, including management, research, and teaching.

8 You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.

9 You must regularly take part in activities that maintain and develop your competence and performance.

10 You should be willing to find and take part in structured support opportunities offered by your employer or

contracting body (for example, mentoring). You should do this when you join an organisation and whenever your role changes significantly throughout your career.

11 You must be familiar with guidelines and developments that affect your work.

12 You must keep up to date with, and follow, the law, our guidance, and other regulations relevant to your work.

13 You must take steps to monitor and improve the quality of your work.

Apply knowledge and experience to practice.

14 You must recognise and work within the limits of your competence.

15 You must provide a good standard of practice and care. If you assess, diagnose, or treat patients, you must:

- Adequately assess the patient's conditions, taking account of their history (including the symptoms and psychological, spiritual, social, and cultural factors); their views and values; and where necessary, examine the patient.
- Promptly provide or arrange suitable advice, investigations, or treatment where necessary
- Refer a patient to another practitioner when this best serves the patient's needs.

16 Maintain the trust of colleagues and treat them respectfully.

Work with colleagues in ways that best serve patients' interests.

Providing Clinical Care

17 You must work in partnership with patients by:

- Listening to them and responding to their concerns and preferences
- Being aware of and sensitive to differing cultural attitudes of patients toward health and medical treatment.

- Giving them the information, they want or need in a way they can understand, and ensuring they understand it.
- Respecting their right to reach decisions with you about their treatment and care.
- Supporting them in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their health.

- Suggesting drugs or treatment, including repeat prescriptions, only when you have adequate knowledge of the patient's health and are satisfied that the drugs or treatment serve the patient's needs.
- Providing effective treatments based on the best available evidence.
- taking all possible steps to alleviate pain and distress whether or not a cure may be possible.
- Consulting your clinical supervisor (s) and colleagues where appropriate.
- Respecting the patient's right to seek a second opinion.
- Checking that the care or treatment you provide for each patient is compatible with any other treatments the patient is receiving, including (where possible) self-prescribed, over-the-counter medications.

- Wherever possible, avoid providing medical care to yourself or anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship.

18 You must be satisfied that you have consent or other valid authority before you carry out any examination or investigation, provide treatment or involve patients or volunteers in teaching or research.

19 You must make good use of the resources available to you.

20 Documents you make (including clinical records) to formally record your work must be clear, accurate and legible. You should make records at the same time as the events you are recording or as soon as possible thereafter.

21 You must keep records that contain personal information about patients, colleagues, or others securely, and in line with any data protection requirements.

22 Clinical records should include:

- Relevant clinical findings.
- The decisions made and actions agreed, and who is making the decisions and agreeing to the actions.
- The information given to patients.
- Any medications prescribed or other investigation or treatment.
- Who is making the record and when.

Safety and quality

Contribute to and comply with systems to protect patients.

23 You must take part in systems of quality assurance and quality improvement to promote patient safety. This includes:

- Taking part in regular reviews and audits of your work and that of your team, responding constructively to the outcomes, taking steps to address any problems and carrying out further training where necessary.
- Regularly reflecting on your standards of practice and the care you provide
- Reviewing patient feedback where it is available.

24 To help keep patients safe you must:

- Contribute to confidential inquiries.
- Contribute to adverse event recognition.
- Report adverse incidents involving medical devices that put, or have the potential to put, the safety of a patient or another person at risk.
- Report suspected adverse drug reactions.
- Respond to requests from organisations monitoring public health.

When providing information for these purposes you should still respect the patient's confidentiality.

25 You must promote and encourage a culture that allows all staff to raise concerns openly and safely.

26 You must take prompt action if you think that patient safety, dignity or comfort is or may be seriously compromised.

- If a patient is not receiving basic care to meet their needs, you must immediately tell someone who is able to act straight away.
- If patients are at risk because of inadequate premises, equipment, or other resources, policies, or systems, you should put the matter right if possible. You must raise your concern in line with your workplace policy. You should also make a record of the steps you have taken.
- If you have concerns that a colleague may not be fit to practise and may be putting patients at risk, you must ask for advice from a colleague, Medical Council New Zealand, or NZPAS. If you are still concerned, you must report this in line with our guidance and your workplace policy and make a record of the steps you have taken.

27 You must offer help if emergencies arise in clinical settings or in the community, taking account of your own safety, your competence, and the availability of other options for care.

28 Whether or not you have vulnerable adults or children and young people as patients, you should consider their needs and welfare and offer them help if you think their rights have been abused or denied.

Some patients are likely to be more vulnerable than others because of their illness, disability, or frailty, or because of their current circumstances, such as bereavement or redundancy. You should treat children and young people under 18 years as vulnerable. Vulnerability can be temporary or permanent.

29 If you know or suspect that you have a serious condition that you could pass on to patients, or if your judgement or performance could be affected by a condition or its treatment, you must consult a suitably qualified colleague. You must follow their advice about any changes to your practice they consider necessary. You must not rely on your own assessment of the risk to patients.

30 You should be immunised against common serious communicable diseases (unless otherwise contraindicated).

31 You should be registered with a general practitioner outside your family.

Communication, partnership, and teamwork

Communicate effectively.

32 You must listen to patients, take account of their views, and respond honestly to their questions.

33 You must give patients the information they want or need to know in a way they can understand. You should make sure that arrangements are made, wherever possible, to meet patients' language and communication needs.

34 You must be considerate to those close to the patient and be sensitive and responsive in giving information and support.

35 When you are on duty you must be readily accessible to patients and colleagues seeking information, advice, or support.

Work collaboratively with colleagues to maintain or improve patient care.

36 You must work collaboratively with colleagues, respecting their skills and contributions.

37 You must treat colleagues fairly and with respect.

38 You must be aware of how your behaviour may influence others within and outside the team.

39 Patient safety may be affected if there is not enough medical cover. So, you must take up any post you have formally accepted and work your contractual notice period before leaving the job, unless the employer has reasonable time to make other arrangements.

Teaching, training, supporting, and assessing.

40 You should be prepared to contribute to teaching and training PAs and students.

41 You must make sure that all staff you manage have appropriate supervision.

42 You must be honest and objective when writing references, and when appraising or assessing the performance of colleagues, including locums and students.

References must include all information relevant to your colleagues 'competence and conduct.

43 You should be willing to take on a mentoring role for more junior PAs and other healthcare professionals.

44 You must support colleagues who have problems with their performance or health. But you must always put patient safety first.

Continuity and coordination of care

45 You must contribute to the safe transfer of patients between healthcare providers and between health and social care providers. This means you must:

- Share all relevant information with colleagues involved in your patients' care within and outside the team, including when you hand over care as you go off duty, and when you delegate care or refer patients to other health or social care providers.
- Check, where practical, that a named clinician or team has taken over responsibility when your role in providing

a patient's care has ended. This may be particularly important for patients with impaired capacity or who are vulnerable for other reasons.

46 When you do not provide your patient's care yourself, for example when you are off duty or you delegate the care of a patient to a colleague, you must be satisfied that the person providing care has the appropriate qualifications, skills, and experience to provide safe care for the patient.

Establish and maintain partnerships with patients.

Treat patients and colleagues fairly and without discrimination

47 New Zealand has as its founding document the Treaty of Waitangi. You should acknowledge the place of the Treaty, and apply the principles of partnership, participation and protection in the delivery of medical care. You must also be aware of cultural diversity and cultural safety, and function effectively and respectfully when working with and treating people of all cultural backgrounds. You should acknowledge:

- That New Zealand has a culturally diverse population.
- That each patient has cultural needs specific to them.

- That a PA's culture and belief systems influence how that PA interacts with patients
- That one's culture may impact on the PA-patient relationship
- That a positive outcome for patient and PA is achieved when they have mutual respect and understanding

48 You must be polite and considerate.

49 You must treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity and privacy.

50 You must treat patients fairly and with respect, whatever their life choices and beliefs.

51 You must work in partnership with patients, sharing with them the information they will need to make decisions about their care, including:

- Their condition, its likely progression and the options for treatment, including associated risks and uncertainties.

- The progress of their care, and your role and responsibilities in the team.
- Who is responsible for each aspect of patient care, and how information is shared within teams and among those who will be providing the care.
- Any other information patients need if they are asked to be involved in teaching or research.

52 You must treat information about patients as confidential. This also applies after a patient has died.

53 You must support patients in caring for themselves to empower them to improve and maintain their health. This may, for example, include:

- Advising patients on the effects of their life choices and lifestyle on their health and wellbeing
- Supporting patients to make lifestyle changes where appropriate.

54 You must explain to patients if you have a conscientious objection to a particular procedure. You must tell them about their right to see another PA or healthcare

professional and make sure they have enough information to exercise that right. In providing this information you must not imply or express disapproval of the patient's lifestyle choices, or beliefs.

Show respect for patients.

55 You must not use your professional position to pursue a sexual or improper emotional relationship with a patient or someone close to them.

56 You must not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious, and moral beliefs) to patients in ways that exploit their vulnerability or are likely to cause them distress.

57 You must be open and honest with patients if things go wrong. You should also seek advice from your supervising clinician. If a patient under your care has suffered harm or distress, you should:

- Put matters right (if that is possible)
- Offer an apology.

- Explain fully and promptly what has happened and the likely short-term and long-term effects.

58 You must give priority to patients based on their clinical need if these decisions are within your power. If inadequate resources, policies, or systems prevent you from doing this, and patient safety, dignity or comfort may be seriously compromised, you must follow the guidance in paragraph 26.

59 The investigations or treatment you provide or arrange must be based on the assessment you and your patient make of their needs and priorities, and on your clinical judgement about the likely effectiveness of the treatment options. You must not refuse or delay treatment because you believe that a patient's actions or lifestyle have contributed to their condition.

60 You must not deny treatment to patients because their medical condition may put you at risk. If a patient poses a risk to your health or safety, you should take all available steps to minimise the risk before providing treatment or making suitable alternative arrangements for providing treatment.

61 You must not unfairly discriminate against patients or colleagues by allowing your personal views to affect your professional relationships or the treatment you provide or arrange. This includes your views about a patient's or colleague's lifestyle, culture or their social or economic status, as well as the characteristics protected by legislation: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

62 You must consider and respond to the needs of disabled patients and should make reasonable adjustments to your practice so they can receive care to meet their needs.

63 You must respond promptly, fully, and honestly to complaints and apologise when appropriate. You must not allow a patient's complaint to adversely affect the care or treatment you provide or arrange.

64 You should end a professional relationship with a patient only when the breakdown of trust between you and the patient means you cannot provide good clinical care to the patient.

65 You must make sure you have adequate insurance or indemnity cover so that your patients will not be disadvantaged if they make a claim about the clinical care you have provided in New Zealand.

66 If someone you have contact within your professional role asks for your registered name and/or National Certification reference number, you must give this information to them.

Act with honesty and integrity

67 You must make sure that your conduct justifies your patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the profession.

68 You must always be honest about your experience, qualifications and current role and always present yourself as a Physician Associate and not any other type of medical professional such as a physician.

Communicating information

69 You must be honest and trustworthy in all communication with patients and colleagues. This means you must make clear the limits of your knowledge and make

reasonable checks to make sure any information you give is accurate.

70 When communicating publicly, including speaking to or writing in the media, you must maintain patient confidentiality. You should remember when using social media that communications intended for friends or family may become more widely available.

71 When advertising your services, you must make sure the information you publish is factual and can be checked and does not exploit patients' vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge.

72 You must be honest and trustworthy when writing reports, and when completing or signing forms, reports, and other documents. You must make sure that any documents you write, or sign are not false or misleading.

- You must take reasonable steps to check the information is correct.
- You must not deliberately leave out relevant information.

Openness and legal or disciplinary proceedings

73 You must be honest and trustworthy when giving evidence to courts or tribunals. You must make sure that any evidence you give or documents you write, or sign are not false or misleading.

- You must take reasonable steps to check the information.
- You must not deliberately leave out relevant information.

74 You must cooperate with formal inquiries and complaints procedures and must offer all relevant information while following the guidance in confidentiality.

75 You must make clear the limits of your competence and knowledge when giving evidence or acting as a witness.

76 You must self-declare without delay if anywhere in the world:

- You have received a caution from the police or been criticised by an official inquiry.
- You have been charged with, or found guilty of, a criminal offence.
- Another professional body has made a finding against your registration as a result of fitness to practise or conduct procedures.

77 If you are suspended by an organisation from a PA post, or have restrictions placed on your practice, you must, without delay, inform any other organisations for whom you carry out medical work.

Honesty in financial dealings

78 You must be honest in financial and commercial dealings with patients, employers, insurers and other organisations or individuals.

79 You must not allow any interests you have to affect the way you treat, refer or commission services for patients.

80 If you are faced with a conflict of interest, you must be open about the conflict, declaring your interest formally, and you should be prepared to exclude yourself from decision making.

81 You must not ask for or accept; from patients, colleagues, or others; any inducement, gift or hospitality that may affect or be seen to affect the way you prescribe for, treat or refer patients, or commission services for patients. You must not offer these inducements.

Statement of values of the physician associate profession

A PA should:

- Hold as their primary responsibility the health, safety, welfare and dignity of all human beings.
- Uphold the tenets of patient autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.
- Recognise and promote the value of diversity.
- Treat equally all persons who seek their care
- Hold in confidence the information shared in the course of practising medicine.

- Assess their personal capabilities and limitations, striving always to improve their medical practice.
- Actively seek to expand their knowledge and skills, keeping abreast of advances in medicine
- Work with other members of the healthcare team to provide compassionate and effective care of patients.
- Use their knowledge and experience to contribute to an improved community.
- Respect their professional relationship with physicians.
- Share and expand knowledge within the profession.
- Consistently behave with integrity and sensitivity
- Behave as an ambassador for the role of physician associate, acting professionally and behaving considerately towards other professionals and patients.
- Recognise and work within their limitations of professional competence and scope of professional practice.
- Maintain effective relationships with colleagues from other health and social care professions.
- Inform patients, carers and others of the nature of their clinical role.
- Contribute to the effectiveness of a clinical learning environment.

- Be a good role model.
- Be aware that their conduct outside their practice in daily life, if illegal or unbecoming of their profession, may impact on their professional working life – this would include explicit discussion of professional issues inappropriately on social networking sites.



Physician Associate Attestation:

I have read the NZPAS Professional Standards and Code of Conduct for physician associates practicing in New Zealand. I agree to uphold the standards of clinical and cultural competence as well as standards of ethical conduct while practicing medicine in New Zealand.

First Name

Last Name

Date

Signature