

Professional Codes of Ethics

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1. Introduction

- **Code of ethics:** a formal set of principles and standards that guides the conduct of members of a profession.
- In healthcare, codes protect patients, uphold trust, and define accountability for practitioners.

2. Core Principles

- **Autonomy:** respecting a patient's right to make informed decisions about their own care.
- **Beneficence and non-maleficence:** acting in the patient's best interest while avoiding harm.
- **Justice:** treating patients fairly and distributing resources equitably.

3. Key Professional Codes

- The Hippocratic Oath and modern declarations (e.g. the WMA Declaration of Geneva) shape medical ethics.
- Nursing bodies follow codes such as the ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses, emphasising care and confidentiality.
- National regulators publish codes that members must follow to retain licensure.

4. Duties of the Professional

- **Confidentiality:** safeguarding patient information except where disclosure is legally required.
- **Competence:** maintaining knowledge and skills through continuing professional development.
- **Integrity:** being honest, avoiding conflicts of interest, and reporting misconduct.

5. Enforcement and Accountability

- Professional bodies investigate breaches and can issue warnings, suspension, or removal from the register.
- Adhering to a code reduces legal liability and reinforces public confidence in the profession.