

Appendix 3

Professions Australia's code of ethics¹

The most obvious way to recognise professional competencies is by a formal qualification together with peer recognition or references and membership of a professional organisation.

A professional organisation's standards for entry should also include a requirement to adhere to an enforceable *Code of Ethics*, the requirement to commit to measurable ongoing professional development and sanctions for conduct that falls below the required standards.

Dr Damian Grace defines ethics as 'a way of living one's life in pursuit of excellence. Ethics is not just a private matter. It has its public and private sides—but it cannot be just personal.' Also, 'ethics is not mere conformity to rules.' Acting in a way which breaches the law of the land can certainly not be taken to be done in the name of ethics.

Professionals have an ethical obligation to act in the best interest of their client/patient. Ethical duties also prohibit professionals from acting to promote their own self-interest.

A *Code of Ethics* has two aspects:

- 1) The content comprising the requirements, the rules, principles, ideals etc
- 2) The commitment of the members of the occupation or organisation to conform to, and otherwise uphold, these rules and ideals.

Codes of Ethics should ideally address the following principles:

- 1) Describe not only minimum standards, but also occupational ideals; in so doing they should include not only action guiding principles, but also virtues and desirable attitudes.
- 2) Contain a statement to the effect that minimum standards ought not to be compromised, even in the face of internal pressure from the occupation or organisation to which one belongs or external pressure from outside organisational groups.

¹ Extracted from *Professions Australia* under the Ethics Resource Centre, Code of Ethics, <http://www.professions.com.au/codeprinciples.html>.

- 3) Contain a statement to the effect that members of the occupation or organisation ought to obey the just and reasonable laws of the community.
- 4) Contain a statement expressing a commitment to the principle of individual autonomy (comprising freedom of action, speech, to work etc.) – the cornerstone of a free society.
- 5) Contain a statement expressing commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of gender, race etc.
- 6) Contain a statement to the effect that members of the occupation or organisation ought to obey the just and reasonable regulations governing the activity of the members of the occupation or organisation in question.
- 7) Contain an integrity statement to the effect that members of the occupation or organisation ought to avoid telling lies (tell the truth) and do what they say they will do (keep their promises.)
- 8) Set out the fundamental goals or ends of an occupation, as well as the constraints on the pursuit of those ends, for example, health, law and order, education, provision of housing.
- 9) Prioritise some of the principles, rights and ideals listed in the code.
- 10) Set out the principle rights of members of the occupation in relation to salient groups such as employers, peers and clients, for example, sphere of autonomy in relation to their employers.
- 11) Contain a statement or statements committing members to respect the relevant rights of consumers and clients, for example, informed consent in relation to the work to be undertaken and the fees and payments to be charged, privacy and confidentiality.
- 12) Contain a statement to the effect that complaints and disciplinary processes ought to conform to principles of independence, reasonableness and fairness.
- 13) Contain a statement to the effect that members ought to undertake work that they are competent to perform.
- 14) Contain a statement to the effect that members ought to undertake their work conscientiously, and with efficiency and effectiveness.
- 15) Contain a statement regarding adequate initial and ongoing education.
- 16) Contain a statement committing members to compete fairly in the market.
- 17) Contain a statement expressing the principle that one should build one's professional or occupational reputation on the basis of merit.

- 18) Address the issue of occupational or organisational culture, for example, secrecy and closing ranks in relation to wrongdoing or incompetence on the part of peers.
- 19) Address problematic ethical issues that their members confront, for example, the appropriate role of the market in relation to the provision of medical services, conflicts of interest that arise from various sources including role confusion.
- 20) Contain a statement in relation to the collective responsibility of members to report on any failure of their peers to meet minimum standards.
- 21) Contain a statement in relation to the need for loyalty and cooperation among members of an occupation in the service of the goals and ideals of the occupation.
- 22) The ethical issues raised by members of an occupation working in a multi-disciplinary workplace, or working in an organisation which might have requirements that are in potential conflict with the requirements of their occupation, need to be addressed in their occupational code of ethics, and/or the codes of ethics of the organisations in question.