University of Limerick
Graduate Entry Medical School

Code of Professional Practice
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Code of Professional Practice for Students at the UL Graduate Entry Medical School

1. Background

Doctors and other health professionals must observe a code of professional and ethical behaviour particularly in their dealings with patients and also in their dealings with peers and supervisors. For doctors in Ireland, this code of professional behaviour is enshrined in the Medical Council’s document “Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners”, currently in its 7th edition. http://www.medicalcouncil.ie/News-and-Publications/Publications/Professional-Conduct-Ethics/Guide-to-Professional-Conduct-and-Behaviour-for-Registered-Medical-Practitioners-pdf.pdf

This document highlights the bond of trust between a doctor and a patient and the damage that occurs when the ethical basis for clinical practice is neglected. Such neglect will cause the Medical Council to investigate the doctor’s conduct and where appropriate to censure the doctor or even to remove his or her name from the Register of Medical Practitioners.

A medical student also occupies a privileged position in that he or she learns how to become a doctor through contact with sick and vulnerable people. This places the medical student in a position of great trust, which carries with it a weight of responsibility. Improper conduct by a medical student has the potential to upset or even to seriously harm a patient and/or the patient’s family. Such conduct can also damage the reputation of the medical profession and erode the trust accorded to it by society.

Medical schools increasingly see the need to state the responsibilities of medical students explicitly and many now require that students formally agree to observe a ‘Code of Professional Practice’. It is clearly impossible for any Code to direct a student’s behaviour in every situation. The aim, therefore, is to put forward a set of principles that students must apply, particularly in the clinical setting in which they are working. The Medical Council publication “Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour appropriate for Medical Students” is a useful guide for Medical Schools and students alike.

If students infringe the principles set out in the ‘Code of Professional Practice’, mechanisms must be in place to ensure that the situation is dealt with appropriately, fairly and speedily. All students share responsibility to uphold the standards of professional practice and should advise each other and/or seek advice to ensure the standards are upheld.

Student misconduct generally falls into one of a number of categories:

1.1 Category A
- Communication issues (including harassment, bullying, intimidation, threats)
- Breach of patient confidentiality
- Habitual non-attendance at scheduled educational activities
- Habitual lack of punctuality
- Infringement of dress code
- Other forms of ‘inappropriate’ conduct
- Breach of the University’s Code of Conduct

1.2 Category B
- Physical or mental health problems that compromise fitness to practice.
1.3 **Category C**
- Boundary violation, particularly in relation to interaction with patients
- Committing an assault
- Committing a criminal offence
- Becoming addicted to substances that impair capacity
- Engaging in discreditable conduct

2. **Code of Professional Practice for Medical Students at UL**

2.1 Medical students at UL are required to exhibit a high standard of conduct and behaviour and also to demonstrate the physical and mental capacity required of a registered medical practitioner.

2.2 Specifically, UL medical students are expected:

(i) To introduce themselves to patients as medical students, to verify the identity of the patient, to obtain their consent to conduct a procedure, and to respect the right of the patient to refuse consent.

(ii) To listen to patients and respect their views, treat them politely and considerately, respect patients' privacy and dignity, and respect their right to refuse to take part in teaching.

(iii) Not to allow their views about a person’s lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, gender, sexuality, age, social status, or perceived economic worth to prejudice any interaction with patients, teachers, or colleagues.

(iv) To be honest and not abuse the trust of a patient or other vulnerable person, and not enter into an improper relationship with such a person.

(v) Always to make clear to patients that they are students and not qualified doctors. Medical students must not recommend treatment or suggest that patients take any action that might be interpreted as medical advice.

(vi) To acknowledge their professional and personal limitations in knowledge and abilities and, when appropriate, to seek assistance from a supervisor.

(vii) To understand, accept and agree to be bound by the principle of confidentiality of patient records and patient data. Students must not discuss patients with other students or health professionals outside of the clinical setting, except anonymously. When recording data or discussing cases outside of the clinical setting, students must ensure that patients cannot be identified.

(viii) To maintain appropriate standards of dress, appearance and personal hygiene so as not to impede interaction with patients or colleagues.

(ix) To undertake physical examinations of consenting patients of both sexes (which includes touching and intimate examinations) in order to establish a clinical diagnosis, irrespective of the gender, culture, beliefs, disability, or disease of the patient.
(x) To comply at all times with the regulations, codes of practice and formal processes of UL and its affiliated institutions.

(xi) To attend classes as required, work diligently, be honest in submitting course work for assessment, never participate in an form of cheating and never plagiarise material (i.e. not to submit the work of others as their own).

(xii) Treat each other and all University staff and students with courtesy and respect. In turn, students can expect to be treated with courtesy and respect by fellow students and by University staff.

(xiii) Not to use social media to comment on patients, University staff and students or staff of affiliated institutions.

(xiv) Not to make any unauthorised recordings of lectures, teaching sessions or patients.

(xv) To inform the University immediately if they have been or become the subject of any proceedings that may call their fitness to practise medicine into question, in particular if charged with or convicted of a criminal offence or given an official Garda (or police) caution.

(xvi) To notify the UL occupational health service immediately if they come in to contact with or contract a statutorily notifiable or other infectious disease or if there is any significant change to their health or new diagnosis that might affect their fitness to be a medical student or to practise as a doctor.

(xvii) To submit to a medical or occupational health examination and to any medical investigation and to accept any immunisations against infection when deemed necessary for the protection of patients, staff or other students at the request of UL at any time.

(xviii) Never to engage in dishonest behaviour specifically in relation to the forging of signatures.

(xix) To submit evidence of vetting before the early patient contact programme begins.

All students should familiarise themselves with the Medical Council’s publication “Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour appropriate for Medical Students”.

http://medicalcouncil.ie/Education/Career-Stage-Undergraduate/Guidelines-for-Medical-Schools-on-Ethical-Standards-and-Behaviour-appropriate-for-Medical-Students.pdf

3. The Professional Practice Committee

The Medical School’s Professional Practice Committee is responsible for dealing with all breaches of the Code of Professional Practice for UL Medical Students. The role of this
Committee is to provide expert advice and opinion on the standard of professional practice expected from students enrolled in the BM BS degree and to take action when student conduct and behaviour are in breach of these standards. The membership of the Committee is constituted so as to reflect the expectations of the university, the medical profession, and the wider community.

3.1 Membership of the Professional Practice Committee:

- A senior professional health care clinician as Chairperson (appointed by the Head of School)
- The Medical School’s Director of Education
- A nominee of the Medical School’s Advisory Committee

3.2 Terms of Reference:

The Professional Practice Committee is responsible to the Medical School’s Education Committee for the specification of standards of professional behaviour and fitness to practice for students within the School and for the monitoring and maintenance of these standards.

The Professional Practice Committee will:

(i) Review professional behaviour and fitness to practice policies and procedures for recommendation to the Medical School’s Education Committee

(ii) Provide advice to staff and students on issues relating to professional behaviour and fitness to practice

(iii) Receive complaints of student conduct and behaviour which is inappropriate and/or inconsistent with expected standards

(iv) Provide opportunities for counselling, reflection and remediation to any student whose conduct is identified as unsatisfactory

(v) Assess allegations of unsatisfactory student behaviour and conduct and make determinations as provided for below

(vi) Where allegations come within the province of the University’s Code of Conduct, to refer such cases to the University’s Disciplinary Procedures.

All proceedings before the Professional Practice Committee are confidential. This includes, but is not limited to, the parties appearing before the Committee, the composition of the Committee hearing the matter, the character and nature of the allegations, the findings, decisions and recommendations of the Committee.

3.3 Powers of the Committee

In considering any complaint which is in breach of the Code of Professional Practice, the Professional Practice Committee has the power to:

(i) Dismiss the allegation;
(ii) Issue the student with a formal warning;

(iii) Order remediation, re-education or counselling;

(iv) Recommend to the Head of School that the student be restricted from undertaking clinical or other activity pending a formal hearing of the complaint by the University’s Discipline Committee;

(v) Recommend to the Head of School that the student be excluded from the programme pending a formal hearing of the complaint by the University’s Discipline Committee.

(vi) Recommend to the Head of School that the matter be referred directly to the University’s Disciplinary Procedures Committee

3.4 Meetings

The Committee will meet as and when required and directed by the Chair. The nature and volume of complaints will determine the urgency and frequency of meetings.

4. Managing Breaches of the Code of Professional Practice

4.1 As part of the Year 1 orientation, students will be informed about all aspects of the Medical School’s Code of Conduct and will be obliged to commit to it by way of a written statement. In addition, students will be directed to those sections of the UL Student Handbook which deal with:

- Academic Regulations
- Code of Conduct
- Final Assessment Regulations
- Plagiarism at College


The Medical Council’s document “Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour appropriate for Medical Students” can be found: http://medicalcouncil.ie/Education/Career-Stage-Undergraduate/Guidelines-for-Medical-Schools-on-Ethical-Standards-and-Behaviour-appropriate-for-Medical-Students.pdf

4.2 When a formal complaint about a student’s conduct is being considered, the following process will apply:
4.2.1 The person identifying the inappropriate or unacceptable conduct will contact the Chair of the Professional Practice Committee by letter, telephone or email. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Committee will take the appropriate action, as described in sections 4.2.2 – 4.2.4.

4.2.2 If there are reasonable grounds to believe that a student’s conduct places a patient(s) at risk, the student will be immediately removed from the clinical environment. The Chair of the Professional Practice Committee will recommend to the Head of School that the student be suspended from continuing with clinical or other activity. The Head of School will then advise the student of this decision and also refer the case back to the Professional Practice Committee for it to make a recommendation on remediation and/or the future engagement of the student in clinical or other activities or to refer the case to the University’s Disciplinary Procedures.

4.2.3 The Professional Behaviour Committee may determine that the complaint is to be resolved through the issue of an official warning. In this case a note describing the misconduct will be entered into the student’s record. Where there are no further complaints, the note will be removed from the student’s record when they have completed the course.

4.2.4 When a complaint is made against a student who has previously received one official warning, the Professional Practice Committee may

- Dismiss the allegation; or
- Issue a second formal warning;
- And/or offer the opportunity for remedial counselling, re-education or referral to an appropriate service where necessary.

4.2.5 When a complaint is made against a student who has previously received one official warning, the student will be required to attend a formal hearing into his/her alleged misconduct by the Professional Practice Committee.

The proceedings of the Committee will be documented. The student may be accompanied but may not be legally represented before the Committee.

The student will be informed in writing of the Committee’s decisions and recommendations.

5. Referral to the Discipline Committee

The Head of School may refer the allegation to the Discipline Committee of the University.

6. Appeals

Decisions of the Professional Practice Committee may be appealed to the Head of School.
Decisions of the University Discipline Committee may be appealed to Disciplines Appeals Committee as described in section 4 of the University’s Code of Conduct.