



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Scoil an Leighis
School of Medicine

Bachelor of Medicine Bachelor of Surgery

Fitness to Practise Standards

ul.ie/medicine

Introduction

A medical student 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.

In 2015 the Medical Council of Ireland published *Guidelines for Medical Schools and Medical Students on Undergraduate Professionalism*¹. In its Executive Statement the document established a fundamental principle: when students do not (because they will not or cannot) demonstrate professionalism, they should not be allowed to graduate with a medical degree even if they demonstrate satisfactory academic outcomes. This was followed in 2016 by the publication of the Medical Council's *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners*, which outlines the three pillars of professional practice (partnership, practice and performance) and the specific standards required of registered medical practitioners².

The School of Medicine has identified specific professionalism and fitness to practise standards by which all of its medical students are expected to abide by in its 'Fitness to Practise Standards'³. These standards have been informed by the Irish Medical Council and the UK's Medical Councils guidelines on professionalism and fitness to practise^{4, 5}:

At all times, all BMBS students must be aware of and adhere to the School of Medicine Fitness to Practise Standards and are required to inform their Course Director if they are unable to do so.

Specific themes, which underpin the Fitness to Practise Standards, are outlined below:

- 1) Protect the patient
- 2) Maintain patient confidentiality
- 3) Work within scope of practice
- 4) Work effectively with colleagues
- 5) Be honest and trustworthy
- 6) Maintain good professional practice
- 7) Contribute to the education of others
- 8) Address personal health & well-being

Below is the list of Fitness to Practise Standards that all Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery students are expected to abide by:

1) Protect the Patient

- To introduce themselves to patients as medical students, to verify the identity of the patient, to obtain their consent to interview them or conduct a procedure, and to respect the right of the patient to refuse consent.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- To undertake all physical examinations of patients, with their consent, required to fulfil the expected learning outcomes of the programme.
- Understand that patients should be offered the presence of a chaperone where an intimate examination is proposed.
- When seeking verbal consent from patients for a minor procedure (e.g. obtaining a blood sample, taking an Electrocardiogram), ensure that it is a procedure with which one is very familiar and can explain fully to the patient. If in doubt about one's understanding of the procedure, the student should seek advice from their supervisor.

2) Maintain Patient Confidentiality

- Take all reasonable precautions to ensure that any personal information concerning other students and colleagues is kept confidential.
- Ensure that references to patients are anonymised if the information is to be available to those outside the clinical team, unless the patient has given permission otherwise.
- Never discuss patients with other students or professionals outside the academic and/or clinical context.
- Never discuss individual patients – or partners, relatives, and friends of patients – even anonymously, within earshot of the general public.
- Understand that discussion in this context includes, but is not limited to, the following – the use of social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, My Space, Bebo, chat rooms, texts, emails etc.

3) Work within scope of practice

- To always to make clear to patients that they are students and not qualified doctors.
- Must not recommend treatment or suggest that patients take any action that might be interpreted as medical advice.

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

4) Work effectively with colleagues

- To demonstrate skills that allow them to deal with uncertainty and change in the workplace.
- To be able to work effectively in a team and to take on different roles as appropriate, including taking responsibility for tasks.
- To develop and demonstrate teamwork and leadership skills.
- To be aware of the roles and responsibilities of other people involved in delivering healthcare.
- To respect the skills and contributions of colleagues and other professionals and not to unfairly discriminate against them.
- To raise concerns about overall practice in a healthcare setting or about colleagues, including other students, medical practitioners and other healthcare workers, with the appropriate person if patients are at risk of harm.

5) Be Honest and Trustworthy

- Never engage in dishonest behaviour specifically in relation to the forging of signatures.
- To bring attention to any concerns about, or errors in, their clinical work.
- To be honest, genuine and original in their academic work, including when conducting research, and take effective action if they have concerns about the honesty of others.
- To be honest in writing CVs and all applications and not misrepresent their qualifications, position or abilities.
- Not to plagiarise others' work or use their own work repeatedly in a way that could mislead be honest and trustworthy in any financial dealings, especially if they are managing finances, and make sure that any funds are used for the purpose they were intended for.
- To co-operate with any formal inquiry by their medical school or other organisation into their health, behaviour or performance, or that of anybody else.

6) Maintain Good Professional Practice

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

- To comply at all times with the regulations, codes of conduct & practice and formal processes of UL and its affiliated institutions including complying fully with Student vetting processes.
- Attend classes as required, work diligently, be honest in submitting course work for assessment, never participate in any form of cheating and never plagiarise material (i.e. not to submit the work of others as their own).
- 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.
- Address adult patients formally, using their title and surname, unless invited by the patient to do otherwise.
- Not to use social media to comment on patients, University staff and students or staff of affiliated institutions.
- Not to make any unauthorised recordings of lectures, teaching sessions or patients.
- Adhere to ethical standards, rules, regulations, policies and procedures governing research.
- Respect the physical infrastructure of academic and clinical settings.
- 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.

7) Contribute to the Education of Others

- To be aware of the principles of education in medicine.
- To be willing to contribute to the education of other students.
- To give constructive feedback on the quality of their learning and teaching experiences.

8) Address Health & Well Being

- To comply with the BMBS Health Screen & Immunisation Policy⁶ by submitting to a medical or occupational health screen and relevant examinations and investigations and accepting any immunisations against infection when deemed necessary for the protection of patients, staff or other students at the request of UL at any time.

- To be aware that their own health problems may put patients and colleagues at risk.
- Disclose to an appropriate academic or clinical adviser if one has a relevant long -term medical condition/disability e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, severe allergies.
- Never consume alcohol or recreational drugs - legal or illegal – at a time when it could impair one's reason or judgement or otherwise impact upon one's professional responsibilities.
- Seek advice from a pharmacist and/or registered medical practitioner regarding the potential impact of any substance or treatment that might impair one's reason or judgement or otherwise impact upon one's professional responsibilities.
- Inform an appropriate academic or clinical adviser and where necessary refrain from contact with patients during the duration of a treatment that might impair one's reason or judgement or otherwise impact upon one's professional responsibilities.
- Inform an appropriate academic or clinical adviser and where necessary refrain from contact with patients if one is being adversely affected by a major life event e.g. bereavement.
- Never advise on the use of any medication, or attempt to prescribe or distribute medication.
- Understand and adhere to the law on illegal drugs, which makes the use or distribution of illegal drugs unacceptable under any circumstances and at any time.
- To accept that one may not be able to accurately assess one's own health, and be willing to be referred for treatment and to engage in any recommended treatment programmes
- To be aware that that on graduation that one is responsible for informing one's employer or other appropriate person if one's health poses a risk to patients or the public.

Health Requirements:

The School of Medicine makes every effort to accommodate students with a range of ambitions, different faiths and backgrounds, as well as those with health conditions and disabilities. Professional setting and practice however will generally require medical students to maintain a level of good physical and mental health. This is to ensure that students and patients are not adversely affected by any health condition, which may arise or be encountered.

As a consequence the School of Medicine requires all BMBS students to attend an Occupational Health provider for pre-placement health screens and vaccination check as outlined in the BMBS Health Screen & Immunisation Policy⁶. The School strongly recommends that all students have up to date vaccinations. Failure to attend for these

pre-placement health screens and vaccination checks will result in students not being able to attend placement and thus delay or prevent completion of the programme.

The University and/or in cooperation with placement partners may also require a student to undergo additional health screening, vaccination, or other forms of health assessment if required. In cases where patient well-being might be compromised by a student's health or behaviour the student will not be allowed to attend placement.

In most cases, health conditions and disabilities will not raise fitness to practise concerns, provided the student receives the appropriate care and reasonable adjustments necessary to study and work safely in a clinical environment.

While students are offered the appropriate level of adjustments and planning as well as discussions regarding their possible post-graduation options in the rare circumstance that a student cannot demonstrate the necessary competence, and if all avenues reasonable to the student and medical school have been explored and a way forward cannot be mutually agreed, it would then be appropriate to consider initiating formal fitness to practise procedures.

Summary

As outlined in the University of Limerick's Fitness to Practise Policy⁷ issues that might impair a student's fitness to practise are wide-ranging and can arise at any time throughout the student's a programme of study. Specific issues may be temporary in nature and can be dealt with informally by advising the student on how best to address conduct, competence or health issues so that fitness to practise issues are managed in a professional manner. In cases where a fitness to practise issue arises that cannot be resolved in this manner the case will be referred to the School of Medicine's Professional Concerns Committee and/or the Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee, as appropriate.

Managing Breaches of the School of Medicine's Fitness to Practise Standards

Where a member of the university's academic or work-based placement staff or other appropriate individual has a concern regarding a student's fitness to practise, s/he will refer the student's case, in the first instance, to the relevant head of discipline or head of department/school. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the concern, the head of discipline or department/school may refer the case to the School of Medicine's Professional Concerns Committee or the Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee. S/He may also decide to refer the case to the disciplinary process under the Student Code of Conduct. In the event of a student carrying out an action that poses an immediate threat to life or the safety of any person or property, the Vice President Academic & Registrar (VPA&R) or person duly authorised to act in his/her stead may exclude the person who is reasonably suspected of being responsible for such action from access to UL facilities, property or placement pending a formal hearing of any fitness to practise concerns.

School of Medicine's Professional Concerns Committee

The School of Medicine's Professional Concerns Committee will provide formal advice and support to students in a number of circumstances including students who have demonstrated:

- a continuing pattern of minor deficits which when viewed in isolation may seem insignificant but when seen cumulatively indicate an issue which has not been resolved by informal advice and support;

- an isolated (but not gross) lapse from previously high standards.

The Professional Concerns Committee will comprise three members of School of Medicine staff to be appointed by the Head of School, including the Head of School or his or her nominee. One individual will be identified as the focal point for liaison with the student regarding their identified deficit. Students will be notified in writing in advance of the meeting which will normally convene within ten working days.

Where appropriate and following consultation, an action plan intended to address and resolve the student's professionalism deficit(s) will be created. Adherence to the action plan will be monitored and in circumstances where a student fails to address and resolve the professionalism deficit(s) identified to the satisfaction of the Professional Concerns Committee, the student may be referred to the Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee.

In circumstances where the Professional Concerns Committee takes the view that an action plan is not appropriate, for example, if there are grounds to believe that the student will not comply with it or the deficit identified is more appropriately dealt with by the Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee, they may refer the case directly to that Committee.

The Professional Concerns Committee may also decide that no action is necessary.

Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee

For further detail on the Faculty Fitness to Practise Committee and the University Fitness to Practise Appeals Committee please see the University Fitness to Practise Policy, available at:

https://ulsites.ul.ie/executive/sites/default/files/exec_fitness_to_practice_policy.pdf

References

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3. School of Medicine Fitness to Practise Standards. Available at: <https://www.ul.ie/medicine/sites/default/files/FitnessToPractiseStandards.pdf>
4. Guidelines for Medical Schools on Ethical Standards and Behaviour appropriate for Medical Students. Available at: <https://www.medicalcouncil.ie/education/career-stage-undergraduate/guidelines-for-medical-schools-on-ethical-standards-and-behaviour-appropriate-for-medical-students.pdf>
5. Medical students professional values and fitness to practise. General Medical Council (2009) available at: http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/achieving_good_medical_practice.asp
6. UL Graduate Entry Medical School Health Screen & Immunisation Policy. Available at: https://www.ul.ie/medicine/sites/default/files/BMBS_Health%20Screen_Immunisation_Policy.pdf
7. University of Limerick's Fitness to Practise Policy. Available at: https://ulsites.ul.ie/executive/sites/default/files/exec_fitness_to_practice_policy.pdf