

The Code

Professional standards of practice
and behaviour for nurses, midwives
and nursing associates

prioritise people

practise effectively

preserve safety

promote professionalism and trust

About us

The Nursing and Midwifery Council exists to protect the public. We do this by making sure that only those who meet our requirements are allowed to practise as a nurse or midwife in the UK, or a nursing associate in England. We take action if concerns are raised about whether a nurse, midwife or nursing associate is fit to practise.

It is against the law to claim to be, or to practise as, a nurse or midwife in the UK, or as a nursing associate in England, if you are not on the relevant part of our register.

It is also a criminal offence for anyone who, with intent to deceive, causes or permits someone else to falsely represent them as being on the register, or makes a false representation about them being on the NMC register.

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Updated to reflect the regulation of nursing associates:
10 October 2018

A note on this version of the Code

All regulators review their Codes from time to time to make sure they continue to reflect public expectations. This new version of the Code is substantially similar to the 2015 version, but it has been updated to reflect our new responsibilities for the regulation of nursing associates. In joining the register, nursing associates will uphold the Code.

The current versions of our Code, standards and guidance can always be found on our website. Those on our register should make sure they are using the most up to date version of the Code.

For more information about the Code, please visit:

www.nmc.org.uk/code

Introduction

The Code contains the professional standards that registered nurses, midwives and nursing associates¹ must uphold. Nurses, midwives and nursing associates must act in line with the Code, whether they are providing direct care to individuals, groups or communities or bringing their professional knowledge to bear on nursing² and midwifery practice in other roles, such as leadership, education, or research. The values and principles set out in the Code can be applied in a range of different practice settings, but they are not negotiable or discretionary.

Our role is to set the standards in the Code, but these are not just our standards. They are the standards that patients and members of the public tell us they expect from health professionals. They are the standards shown every day by those on our register.

When joining our register, and then renewing their registration, nurses, midwives and nursing associates commit to upholding these standards. This commitment to professional standards is fundamental to being part of a profession. We can take action if those on our register fail to uphold the Code. In serious cases, this can include removing them from the register.

1. *Anyone practising as a registered nurse or midwife in the UK, or a nursing associate in England, has to be registered with us. The nursing associate role is being used only in England.*

2. *We have used the word 'nursing' in this document to apply to the work of nurses and nursing associates. Nursing associates are a distinct profession with their own part of our register, but they are part of the nursing team.*

The Code sets out common standards of conduct and behaviour for those on our register. This provides a clear, consistent and positive message to patients, service users and colleagues about what they can expect of those who provide nursing or midwifery care.

The professions we regulate have different knowledge and skills, set out in three distinct standards of proficiency. They can work in diverse contexts and have different levels of autonomy and responsibility. However, all of the professions we regulate exercise professional judgement and are accountable for their work.

Nurses, midwives and nursing associates uphold the Code within the limits of their competence. This means, for example, that while a nurse and nursing associate will play different roles in an aspect of care, they will both uphold the standards in the Code within the contribution they make to overall care. The professional commitment to work within one's competence is a key underpinning principle of the Code (see section 13) which, given the significance of its impact on public protection, should be upheld at all times.

In addition, nurses, midwives and nursing associates are expected to work within the limits of their competence, which may extend beyond the standards they demonstrated in order to join the register.

The Code should be useful for everyone who cares about good nursing and midwifery.

- Patients and service users, and those who care for them, can use it to provide feedback to nurses, midwives and nursing associates about the care they receive.
- Those on our register can use it to promote safe and effective practice in their place of work.
- Employer organisations should support their staff in upholding the standards in their professional Code as part of providing the quality and safety expected by service users and regulators.
- Educators can use the Code to help students understand what it means to be a registered professional and how keeping to the Code helps to achieve that.

For the many committed and expert practitioners on our register, this Code should be seen as a way of reinforcing professionalism. Through revalidation, nurses, midwives and nursing associates provide evidence of their continued ability to practise safely and effectively. The Code is central to the revalidation process as a focus for professional reflection. This gives the Code significance in the professional life of those on our register, and raises its status and importance for employers.

The Code contains a series of statements that taken together signify what good practice by nurses, midwives and nursing associates looks like. It puts the interests of patients and service users first, is safe and effective, and promotes trust through professionalism.

Prioritise people

You put the interests of people using or needing nursing or midwifery services first. You make their care and safety your main concern and make sure that their dignity is preserved and their needs are recognised, assessed and responded to. You make sure that those receiving care are treated with respect, that their rights are upheld and that any discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards those receiving care are challenged.

1 Treat people as individuals and uphold their dignity

To achieve this, you must:

- 1.1 treat people with kindness, respect and compassion
- 1.2 make sure you deliver the fundamentals of care effectively
- 1.3 avoid making assumptions and recognise diversity and individual choice
- 1.4 make sure that any treatment, assistance or care for which you are responsible is delivered without undue delay
- 1.5 respect and uphold people's human rights

2 Listen to people and respond to their preferences and concerns

To achieve this, you must:

- 2.1 work in partnership with people to make sure you deliver care effectively
- 2.2 recognise and respect the contribution that people can make to their own health and wellbeing

The fundamentals of care include, but are not limited to, nutrition, hydration, bladder and bowel care, physical handling and making sure that those receiving care are kept in clean and hygienic conditions. It includes making sure that those receiving care have adequate access to nutrition and hydration, and making sure that you provide help to those who are not able to feed themselves or drink fluid unaided.

- 2.3 encourage and empower people to share in decisions about their treatment and care
- 2.4 respect the level to which people receiving care want to be involved in decisions about their own health, wellbeing and care
- 2.5 respect, support and document a person's right to accept or refuse care and treatment
- 2.6 recognise when people are anxious or in distress and respond compassionately and politely

3 Make sure that people's physical, social and psychological needs are assessed and responded to

To achieve this, you must:

- 3.1 pay special attention to promoting wellbeing, preventing ill-health and meeting the changing health and care needs of people during all life stages
- 3.2 recognise and respond compassionately to the needs of those who are in the last few days and hours of life
- 3.3 act in partnership with those receiving care, helping them to access relevant health and social care, information and support when they need it
- 3.4 act as an advocate for the vulnerable, challenging poor practice and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour relating to their care

4 Act in the best interests of people at all times

To achieve this, you must:

- 4.1 balance the need to act in the best interests of people at all times with the requirement to respect a person's right to accept or refuse treatment
- 4.2 make sure that you get properly informed consent and document it before carrying out any action

- 4.3 keep to all relevant laws about mental capacity that apply in the country in which you are practising, and make sure that the rights and best interests of those who lack capacity are still at the centre of the decision-making process
- 4.4 tell colleagues, your manager and the person receiving care if you have a conscientious objection to a particular procedure and arrange for a suitably qualified colleague to take over responsibility for that person's care

5 Respect people's right to privacy and confidentiality

As a nurse, midwife or nursing associate, you owe a duty of confidentiality to all those who are receiving care. This includes making sure that they are informed about their care and that information about them is shared appropriately.

To achieve this, you must:

- 5.1 respect a person's right to privacy in all aspects of their care
- 5.2 make sure that people are informed about how and why information is used and shared by those who will be providing care
- 5.3 respect that a person's right to privacy and confidentiality continues after they have died
- 5.4 share necessary information with other health and care professionals and agencies only when the interests of patient safety and public protection override the need for confidentiality
- 5.5 share with people, their families and their carers, as far as the law allows, the information they want or need to know about their health, care and ongoing treatment sensitively and in a way they can understand

You can only make a 'conscientious objection' in limited circumstances. For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/standards.

Practise effectively

You assess need and deliver or advise on treatment, or give help (including preventative or rehabilitative care) without too much delay, to the best of your abilities, on the basis of best available evidence. You communicate effectively, keeping clear and accurate records and sharing skills, knowledge and experience where appropriate. You reflect and act on any feedback you receive to improve your practice.

6 Always practise in line with the best available evidence

To achieve this, you must:

- 6.1 make sure that any information or advice given is evidence-based including information relating to using any health and care products or services
- 6.2 maintain the knowledge and skills you need for safe and effective practice

7 Communicate clearly

To achieve this, you must:

- 7.1 use terms that people in your care, colleagues and the public can understand
- 7.2 take reasonable steps to meet people's language and communication needs, providing, wherever possible, assistance to those who need help to communicate their own or other people's needs
- 7.3 use a range of verbal and non-verbal communication methods, and consider cultural sensitivities, to better understand and respond to people's personal and health needs
- 7.4 check people's understanding from time to time to keep misunderstanding or mistakes to a minimum
- 7.5 be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English

8 Work co-operatively

To achieve this, you must:

- 8.1 respect the skills, expertise and contributions of your colleagues, referring matters to them when appropriate
- 8.2 maintain effective communication with colleagues
- 8.3 keep colleagues informed when you are sharing the care of individuals with other health and care professionals and staff
- 8.4 work with colleagues to evaluate the quality of your work and that of the team
- 8.5 work with colleagues to preserve the safety of those receiving care
- 8.6 share information to identify and reduce risk
- 8.7 be supportive of colleagues who are encountering health or performance problems. However, this support must never compromise or be at the expense of patient or public safety

9 Share your skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of people receiving care and your colleagues

To achieve this, you must:

- 9.1 provide honest, accurate and constructive feedback to colleagues
- 9.2 gather and reflect on feedback from a variety of sources, using it to improve your practice and performance
- 9.3 deal with differences of professional opinion with colleagues by discussion and informed debate, respecting their views and opinions and behaving in a professional way at all times
- 9.4 support students' and colleagues' learning to help them develop their professional competence and confidence

10 Keep clear and accurate records relevant to your practice

This applies to the records that are relevant to your scope of practice. It includes but is not limited to patient records.

To achieve this, you must:

- 10.1 complete records at the time or as soon as possible after an event, recording if the notes are written some time after the event
- 10.2 identify any risks or problems that have arisen and the steps taken to deal with them, so that colleagues who use the records have all the information they need
- 10.3 complete records accurately and without any falsification, taking immediate and appropriate action if you become aware that someone has not kept to these requirements
- 10.4 attribute any entries you make in any paper or electronic records to yourself, making sure they are clearly written, dated and timed, and do not include unnecessary abbreviations, jargon or speculation
- 10.5 take all steps to make sure that records are kept securely
- 10.6 collect, treat and store all data and research findings appropriately

11 Be accountable for your decisions to delegate tasks and duties to other people

To achieve this, you must:

- 11.1 only delegate tasks and duties that are within the other person's scope of competence, making sure that they fully understand your instructions
- 11.2 make sure that everyone you delegate tasks to is adequately supervised and supported so they can provide safe and compassionate care
- 11.3 confirm that the outcome of any task you have delegated to someone else meets the required standard

12 Have in place an indemnity arrangement which provides appropriate cover for any practice you take on as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate in the United Kingdom

To achieve this, you must:

- 12.1 make sure that you have an appropriate indemnity arrangement in place relevant to your scope of practice

For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/indemnity.

Preserve safety

You make sure that patient and public safety is not affected. You work within the limits of your competence, exercising your professional 'duty of candour' and raising concerns immediately whenever you come across situations that put patients or public safety at risk. You take necessary action to deal with any concerns where appropriate.

13 Recognise and work within the limits of your competence

To achieve this, you must, as appropriate:

- 13.1 accurately identify, observe and assess signs of normal or worsening physical and mental health in the person receiving care
- 13.2 make a timely referral to another practitioner when any action, care or treatment is required
- 13.3 ask for help from a suitably qualified and experienced professional to carry out any action or procedure that is beyond the limits of your competence
- 13.4 take account of your own personal safety as well as the safety of people in your care
- 13.5 complete the necessary training before carrying out a new role

14 Be open and candid with all service users about all aspects of care and treatment, including when any mistakes or harm have taken place

To achieve this, you must:

- 14.1 act immediately to put right the situation if someone has suffered actual harm for any reason or an incident has happened which had the potential for harm.

- 14.2 explain fully and promptly what has happened, including the likely effects, and apologise to the person affected and, where appropriate, their advocate, family or carers
- 14.3 document all these events formally and take further action (escalate) if appropriate so they can be dealt with quickly

15 Always offer help if an emergency arises in your practice setting or anywhere else

To achieve this, you must:

- 15.1 only act in an emergency within the limits of your knowledge and competence
- 15.2 arrange, wherever possible, for emergency care to be accessed and provided promptly
- 15.3 take account of your own safety, the safety of others and the availability of other options for providing care

16 Act without delay if you believe that there is a risk to patient safety or public protection

To achieve this, you must:

- 16.1 raise and, if necessary, escalate any concerns you may have about patient or public safety, or the level of care people are receiving in your workplace or any other health and care setting and use the channels available to you in line with our guidance and your local working practices
- 16.2 raise your concerns immediately if you are being asked to practise beyond your role, experience and training

The professional duty of candour is about openness and honesty when things go wrong. "Every healthcare professional must be open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress." Joint statement from the Chief Executives of statutory regulators of healthcare professionals

- 16.3 tell someone in authority at the first reasonable opportunity if you experience problems that may prevent you working within the Code or other national standards, taking prompt action to tackle the causes of concern if you can
- 16.4 acknowledge and act on all concerns raised to you, investigating, escalating or dealing with those concerns where it is appropriate for you to do so
- 16.5 not obstruct, intimidate, victimise or in any way hinder a colleague, member of staff, person you care for or member of the public who wants to raise a concern
- 16.6 protect anyone you have management responsibility for from any harm, detriment, victimisation or unwarranted treatment after a concern is raised

For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/raisingconcerns.

17 Raise concerns immediately if you believe a person is vulnerable or at risk and needs extra support and protection

To achieve this, you must:

- 17.1 take all reasonable steps to protect people who are vulnerable or at risk from harm, neglect or abuse
- 17.2 share information if you believe someone may be at risk of harm, in line with the laws relating to the disclosure of information
- 17.3 have knowledge of and keep to the relevant laws and policies about protecting and caring for vulnerable people

18 Advise on, prescribe, supply, dispense or administer medicines within the limits of your training and competence, the law, our guidance and other relevant policies, guidance and regulations

To achieve this, you must:

- 18.1 prescribe, advise on, or provide medicines or treatment, including repeat prescriptions (only if you are suitably qualified) if you have enough knowledge of that person's health and are satisfied that the medicines or treatment serve that person's health needs
- 18.2 keep to appropriate guidelines when giving advice on using controlled drugs and recording the prescribing, supply, dispensing or administration of controlled drugs
- 18.3 make sure that the care or treatment you advise on, prescribe, supply, dispense or administer for each person is compatible with any other care or treatment they are receiving, including (where possible) over-the-counter medicines
- 18.4 take all steps to keep medicines stored securely
- 18.5 wherever possible, avoid prescribing for yourself or for anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship

Prescribing is not within the scope of practice of everyone on our register. Nursing associates don't prescribe, but they may supply, dispense and administer medicines. Nurses and midwives who have successfully completed a further qualification in prescribing and recorded it on our register are the only people on our register that can prescribe.

For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/standards.

19 Be aware of, and reduce as far as possible, any potential for harm associated with your practice

To achieve this, you must:

- 19.1 take measures to reduce as far as possible, the likelihood of mistakes, near misses, harm and the effect of harm if it takes place
- 19.2 take account of current evidence, knowledge and developments in reducing mistakes and the effect of them and the impact of human factors and system failures (see the note below)
- 19.3 keep to and promote recommended practice in relation to controlling and preventing infection
- 19.4 take all reasonable personal precautions necessary to avoid any potential health risks to colleagues, people receiving care and the public

Human factors refer to environmental, organisational and job factors, and human and individual characteristics, which influence behaviour at work in a way which can affect health and safety – Health and Safety Executive. You can find more information at www.hse.gov.uk.

Promote professionalism and trust

You uphold the reputation of your profession at all times. You should display a personal commitment to the standards of practice and behaviour set out in the Code. You should be a model of integrity and leadership for others to aspire to. This should lead to trust and confidence in the professions from patients, people receiving care, other health and care professionals and the public.

20 Uphold the reputation of your profession at all times

To achieve this, you must:

- 20.1 keep to and uphold the standards and values set out in the Code
- 20.2 act with honesty and integrity at all times, treating people fairly and without discrimination, bullying or harassment
- 20.3 be aware at all times of how your behaviour can affect and influence the behaviour of other people
- 20.4 keep to the laws of the country in which you are practising
- 20.5 treat people in a way that does not take advantage of their vulnerability or cause them upset or distress
- 20.6 stay objective and have clear professional boundaries at all times with people in your care (including those who have been in your care in the past), their families and carers
- 20.7 make sure you do not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious or moral beliefs) to people in an inappropriate way

- 20.8 act as a role model of professional behaviour for students and newly qualified nurses, midwives and nursing associates to aspire to
- 20.9 maintain the level of health you need to carry out your professional role
- 20.10 use all forms of spoken, written and digital communication (including social media and networking sites) responsibly, respecting the right to privacy of others at all times

For more guidance on using social media and networking sites, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/standards.

21 Uphold your position as a registered nurse, midwife or nursing associate

To achieve this, you must:

- 21.1 refuse all but the most trivial gifts, favours or hospitality as accepting them could be interpreted as an attempt to gain preferential treatment
- 21.2 never ask for or accept loans from anyone in your care or anyone close to them
- 21.3 act with honesty and integrity in any financial dealings you have with everyone you have a professional relationship with, including people in your care
- 21.4 make sure that any advertisements, publications or published material you produce or have produced for your professional services are accurate, responsible, ethical, do not mislead or exploit vulnerabilities and accurately reflect your relevant skills, experience and qualifications
- 21.5 never use your status as a registered professional to promote causes that are not related to health
- 21.6 cooperate with the media only when it is appropriate to do so, and then always protecting the confidentiality and dignity of people receiving treatment or care

22 Fulfil all registration requirements

To achieve this, you must:

- 22.1 keep to any reasonable requests so we can oversee the registration process
- 22.2 keep to our prescribed hours of practice and carry out continuing professional development activities
- 22.3 keep your knowledge and skills up to date, taking part in appropriate and regular learning and professional development activities that aim to maintain and develop your competence and improve your performance

For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk/standards.

23 Cooperate with all investigations and audits

This includes investigations or audits either against you or relating to others, whether individuals or organisations. It also includes cooperating with requests to act as a witness in any hearing that forms part of an investigation, even after you have left the register.

To achieve this, you must:

- 23.1 cooperate with any audits of training records, registration records or other relevant audits that we may want to carry out to make sure you are still fit to practise
- 23.2 tell both us and any employers as soon as you can about any caution or charge against you, or if you have received a conditional discharge in relation to, or have been found guilty of, a criminal offence (other than a protected caution or conviction)
- 23.3 tell any employers you work for if you have had your practice restricted or had any other conditions imposed on you by us or any other relevant body.

- 23.4 tell us and your employers at the first reasonable opportunity if you are or have been disciplined by any regulatory or licensing organisation, including those who operate outside of the professional health and care environment
- 23.5 give your NMC Pin when any reasonable request for it is made

For more information, please visit our website at www.nmc.org.uk.

24 Respond to any complaints made against you professionally

To achieve this, you must:

- 24.1 never allow someone's complaint to affect the care that is provided to them
- 24.2 use all complaints as a form of feedback and an opportunity for reflection and learning to improve practice

When telling your employers, this includes telling (i) any person, body or organisation you are employed by, or intend to be employed by, as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate; and (ii) any person, body or organisation with whom you have an arrangement to provide services as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate.

25 Provide leadership to make sure people's wellbeing is protected and to improve their experiences of the health and care system

To achieve this, you must:

- 25.1 identify priorities, manage time, staff and resources effectively and deal with risk to make sure that the quality of care or service you deliver is maintained and improved, putting the needs of those receiving care or services first
- 25.2 support any staff you may be responsible for to follow the Code at all times. They must have the knowledge, skills and competence for safe practice; and understand how to raise any concerns linked to any circumstances where the Code has, or could be, broken

Throughout their career, all our registrants will have opportunities to demonstrate leadership qualities, regardless of whether or not they occupy formal leadership positions.

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The nursing and midwifery regulator for England,
Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

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