



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh
Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Optical Registration Board Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Optometrists

Bord Clárúcháin na nGairmithe Radharceolaíochta
Optical Registration Board

Foreword

I am pleased to present the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Optometrists devised by the Optical Registration Board (ORB) at CORU. The code specifies the standards of ethics, conduct and performance expected of registered optometrists.

The Optical Registration Board was appointed on February 2015 by the Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar. The purpose of CORU is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, professional education, training and competence among registrants.

In 2010, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council at CORU developed a framework code detailing common standards across its constituent boards. The framework was reviewed and updated in 2013. The framework was further reviewed and updated in 2018. Many of the standards of ethics, conduct and performance expected of optometrists are common to the health and social care professions to be regulated by CORU. The Optical Registration Board, made up of both lay members and representatives of the profession, have carefully adapted the framework with additional assistance from experts external to the Board, public consultation and international best practice.

This Code outlines the standards of ethical behaviour and conduct that the public expects from optometrists. Each year registrants will be asked to pledge that they comply with the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics. It is essential that all registrants read, understand and meet the standards set out in this Code as failure to do so could result in a complaint of professional misconduct being made about the registrant.

As the goal of the ORB is to protect the public by fostering high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence among registrants, adopting this Code is a major milestone in this process. As the profession develops, the ORB is committed to continually reviewing these standards, in doing so, ensuring that they remain both relevant and comprehensive. We expect that all optometrists will comply with these standards and that the consistent application of these standards will benefit individuals. We look forward to working with optometrists, their employers and service users in realising such benefits through developments in the statutory registration process.

Peter McGrath
Chairperson

Optical Registration Board
23 January 2019

Contents

Foreword	1
About the Code	4
Summary of responsibilities	6
Conduct	8
Performance	13
Ethics	24
Appendix A - Suggested procedure for decision-making	28

About the Code

As a registrant you must comply with this Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.

You must be aware that a breach or breaches of this Code could be held to be professional misconduct or poor professional performance and could result in a disciplinary sanction being imposed following a fitness to practise inquiry.

“Professional misconduct” as defined by the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 as amended means any act, omission or pattern of conduct of the registrant that is a breach of the code of professional conduct and ethics adopted by the registration board of that profession.¹

“Poor professional performance” as defined by the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 as amended means any failure² of the registrant to meet the standards of competence that may reasonably be expected of registrants practising that profession.³

1 Section 50 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

2 Failure in the context of poor professional performance has been interpreted by the Supreme Court as a serious failure. See *Corbally v Medical Council & Ors.* [2015] IESC 9

3 Section 50 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

Complaints may be made against you under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 on the following grounds:

- > Professional misconduct
- > Poor professional performance
- > A relevant medical disability⁴
- > A failure to comply with a term or condition of registration or failure to comply with an undertaking given
- > A contravention of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 or rules made under it or bye-laws
- > A conviction in the State for an offence triable on indictment or a conviction outside the State for an offence consisting of acts or omissions that if done or made in the State would constitute an offence triable on indictment.

In this document:

- > ‘You must’ is used as an overriding principle or duty
- > ‘You must not’ is used as an absolute prohibition
- > ‘You should’ is used to describe the course of action that is generally best practice, but acknowledges that another approach may be appropriate in particular circumstances, or that there may be factors outside your control that affect your ability to comply
- > The term “service users” includes service users, patients, clients and anyone else who uses your service.

In addition to complying with this Code, you also have a duty to keep up-to-date with legislation or legal developments that affect your professional practice.

4 Defined in the 2005 Act, as amended, as a physical or mental disability of the registrant (including addiction to alcohol or drugs) which may impair his or her ability to practise that profession or a particular aspect thereof.

Summary of responsibilities

Below is a summary of your responsibilities as a registrant, grouped into three categories: conduct, performance and ethics. These responsibilities apply to all of the health and social care professions which CORU regulates including Optometrists.

Conduct

1. Act in the best interests of service users
2. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of service users
3. Maintain high standards of personal conduct and behaviour
4. Use social media responsibly
5. Comply with obligations regarding registration

Performance

6. Address health issues related to your fitness to practise
7. Obey laws, regulations and guidelines
8. Comply with requirements for the protection of children and vulnerable adults
9. Act within the limits of your knowledge, skills, competence and experience
10. Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date
11. Obtain consent from service users
12. Assess service users' capacity to consent where necessary
13. Communicate effectively with service users and others involved in their care

14. Act in accordance with the principles of open disclosure
15. Assist, advise and support colleagues, recently qualified registrants and students
16. Teach, supervise and assess students and other professionals
17. Supervise tasks that you delegate to others
18. Keep accurate records
19. Assess health, safety and welfare risks
20. Raise concerns about safety and quality of care
21. Maintain adequate professional indemnity insurance

Ethics

22. Demonstrate ethical awareness
23. Respect the rights and dignity of service users
24. Avoid conflicts of interest
25. Undertake research in an ethical manner
26. Make sure that any advertising is truthful, accurate, lawful and not misleading

Conduct

You must always maintain a high standard of conduct.

1. Act in the best interests of service users

You have a duty to act in the best interests of service users.

You must:

- a. treat service users as individuals, respecting their dignity, privacy and autonomy
- b. respect diversity, different cultures and values
- c. respect and, where appropriate, advocate on behalf of service users
- d. support the service user's right to take part in all aspects of the service provided and to make informed choices about the service they receive
- e. do everything, insofar as within your control, to enhance the health, safety or welfare of a service user
- f. when working in a team, be responsible for:
 - > your own professional conduct,
 - > any service or professional advice you give,
 - > your own failure to act,
 - > any tasks you delegate, and
 - > any delegated tasks performed by you.
- g. insofar as possible, protect service users if you believe they are or may be at risk from another professional's conduct, performance or health

- h. if you become aware of any situation that puts a service user at risk, bring this to the attention of a responsible person or authority
- i. put the safety of service users ahead of personal and professional loyalties.

2. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of service users

2.1 You must:

- a. keep service user information securely and, subject to other provisions of this Code, treat it confidentially, including guarding it against accidental disclosure
- b. share service user information with others only where and to the extent necessary to give safe and effective care or where disclosure is mandated by law
- c. inform service users of the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances in which their information may be shared with others
- d. obtain the consent of a service user before discussing confidential information with their family, carers, friends or other professionals involved in his/her care
- e. always follow employer guidelines and relevant legislation when handling service user information
- f. always follow best practice in relation to the use of service user information in clinical audit, quality assurance, education, training and research.

2.2 You should:

- a. continue to treat service user information as confidential even after the death of the service user
- b. be aware of the following circumstances in which disclosure of confidential information in the absence of consent may be appropriate, justifiable and/or required by law:
 - to prevent harm to the service user or a third party
 - to prevent harm to the public at large
 - to comply with a legal requirement.
- c. inform the service user of the disclosure unless this would cause them serious harm or put the health, safety or welfare of a third party at risk
- d. where you decide that disclosure is justified, you should ensure that the disclosure is made to an appropriate person or organisation, and that the extent of the disclosure is minimized to relevant information.

3. Maintain high standards of personal conduct and behaviour

3.1 You must:

- a. respect the rights and dignity of all individuals
- b. conduct yourself in a manner that enhances public confidence in you and your profession
- c. respect the roles and expertise of other health and social care professionals and work in partnership with them.

3.2 You must not:

- a. harm, abuse or neglect service users
- b. use your professional position to form a relationship of a sexual, inappropriate emotional or exploitative nature with any person

- c. exploit or discriminate against service users, colleagues or staff in the workplace, or condone discrimination by others
- d. behave in a way that would call into question your suitability to work as a health or social care professional
- e. work while under the influence of any substance which may impair your fitness to practise.

4. Use social media⁵ responsibly

4.1 You must:

- a. use social media in a responsible way adopting the same professional standards expected in other forms of communication with service users and others
- b. always consider the possible impact on service users and others before publishing any material, information or comments on social media, taking care to avoid abusive, unsustainable or defamatory comments.

4.2 You must not:

- a. use social media in a way that would breach any of your obligations under this Code
- b. discuss or comment on service users on social media platforms.

4.3 You should:

- a. use appropriate privacy settings in your use of social media and consider how information and images you post might be interpreted by service users and others were they to become widely available
- b. maintain professional boundaries in the use of social media to preserve public trust and confidence in your profession.

5 Defined as web-based platforms or applications that enable users to create and exchange content, including blogs, discussion boards and forums, and networking sites.

5. Comply with obligations regarding registration

You must:

- a. inform the Optical Registration Board within 7 days if you have been convicted of a criminal offence. You must also inform the Board if you have been given an 'adult caution' by An Garda Síochána or a caution from the police in another country
- b. inform the Optical Registration Board within 7 days if your employer or another body has suspended you or placed restrictions on your practice because of concerns about your conduct or competence
- c. co-operate with any investigations or formal inquiry into your professional conduct, the professional conduct of others, or the care or services provided to a service user
- d. practise in the name(s) under which you are registered and always use your CORU registration number when representing yourself as a registered Optometrist
- e. include your CORU registration number in all certificates, reports or other formal documents for which you are responsible, and in any information that you publish about your practice or services
- f. if you change your name, address or employment, notify the Registration Board concerned, as soon as is practicable.

Performance

You must always maintain a high standard of performance in your professional practise.

6. Address health issues related to your fitness to practise

You must:

- a. look after your physical, emotional and psychological health
- b. consult with an appropriate professional if your judgment or performance is or may be adversely affected by illness, addiction, emotional distress or medication. You must follow their advice to avoid harm to service users, yourself and others
- c. limit your practise or stop practising if your performance or health could have a negative effect on service users
- d. follow your employer's guidelines regarding personal health issues which could place service users or others at risk.

7. Obey laws, regulations and guidelines

You must:

- a. know and work within the laws, regulations and guidelines governing your practice and keep up to date with any changes in legislation or regulation or guidelines
- b. obey the laws of the country in which you live and work in both your professional practice and your personal life.

8. Comply with requirements for the protection of children and vulnerable adults

You must:

- a. be aware of and comply with the national guidelines and legislation for the protection of children
- b. be aware of and comply with the national guidelines and legislation for the protection of vulnerable adults
- c. report concerns you have in relation to the welfare of children or vulnerable adults to the appropriate authorities.

9. Act within the limits of your knowledge, skills, competence and experience

You must:

- a. act within the limits of your knowledge, skills, competence and experience
- b. practise only in areas in which you have relevant knowledge, skills, competence, experience or are appropriately supervised
- c. refer the service user to a colleague or other appropriate professional who has the skills, competence or experience to help the service user where a task is beyond your knowledge, skills, competence or experience
- d. refer the service user promptly to another professional and transfer any records relating to the service user to the other professional in circumstances where the service user has the right to a second opinion and it is within your authority to make such a referral
- e. make sure you understand any request from another health or social care professional and only assess, intervene or treat a service user if it is in the service user's best interest. If this is not the case, you must discuss the issue with the service user and the practitioner who made the referral before providing any service

- f. be able to justify any decisions you make within your scope of practice. You are always accountable for what you do, what you fail to do, and for your behaviour
- g. meet professional standards of practice and work in a lawful, safe and effective manner.

10. Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date

10.1 You must:

- a. ensure that your knowledge, skills and performance are of a high standard, up to date and relevant to your practice
- b. participate in continuing professional development (CPD) on an ongoing basis.

10.2 You should:

- a. consider the support and guidance provided by your Registration Board regarding CPD
- b. keep a record of the activities you have completed.

11. Obtain consent from service users

In all circumstances where consent is required to be given in advance of providing any assessment, intervention, treatment or service you must:

- a. take personal responsibility for obtaining consent from the service user, or from someone with legal authority to give consent on the service user's behalf
- b. ensure that, if you have to delegate to a colleague the responsibility for obtaining consent, such colleague is suitably trained and qualified to undertake this responsibility
- c. ensure as far as possible that the consent provided is voluntary and not the result of inappropriate pressure from a third party

- d. provide the service user with sufficient relevant information, in a way that s/he can understand, to enable the service user to decide whether or not to consent
- e. allow time and space, as far as possible, for the service user to take in and understand the information before reaching a decision
- f. answer any questions relating to the assessment, intervention, treatment or service from the service user honestly and as fully as s/he wishes
- g. respect the right of the service user to refuse consent to an assessment, intervention, treatment or service, even if you do not agree with their decision
- h. follow applicable law, regulation and guidance issued by appropriate authorities in relation to the giving of information and recording of the service user's decision
- i. respect a service user's advance healthcare directive in accordance with law, regulations and national policies or guidance.

In emergency circumstances where it is not possible to obtain consent from the service user, you must

- j. provide treatment or other intervention where this is necessary to save life or avoid significant deterioration in the health of the service user.

12. Assess service users' capacity to consent where necessary

12.1 You must:

- a. always presume that all service users have capacity to make their own decisions, even those which you believe to be unwise, unless you have good reason to doubt that this is the case
- b. take all practicable steps to maximise a service user's capacity and provide all practicable supports to enable the service user

to make his or her own decision, including consulting with any persons appointed by the service user to provide support in decision-making

- c. in carrying out an assessment of whether the service user has capacity, consider whether the service user
 - > is able to understand and retain the information relevant to the decision long enough to make a decision
 - > is able to use or weigh that information as part of the process of making the decision, and
 - > is able to communicate his or her decision by any means.
- d. assess service user capacity only by reference to the particular decision to be made at the particular time
- e. understand that the fact that a service user lacks capacity to make a particular decision does not mean that they lack capacity to make other decisions, or that they will lack capacity to make this or other decisions in the future
- f. take reasonable steps to find out whether there is another person who has the legal authority to make a decision on behalf of the service user and if so, consult with such person
- g. document the assessment process undertaken in establishing whether the service user has capacity to make the decision
- h. follow applicable law, regulations and national policies or guidance.

12.2 When carrying out an intervention in respect of a service user who may lack capacity to make a particular decision you must:

- a. carry out an intervention only where it is necessary to do so
- b. make sure that the intervention minimises the restriction of the service user's rights and freedom of action
- c. make sure the intervention is proportionate, and as limited in duration as possible

- d. permit, encourage and facilitate, as far as practicable, the service user to participate or to improve his or her ability to participate as fully as possible in the intervention
- e. give effect as far as practicable to the service user's past and present will and preferences
- f. take into account the service user's beliefs and values, and any other factors the service user would be likely to consider, insofar as these are reasonably ascertainable
- g. consider the views of any person named by the service user as a person to be consulted on the matter and any person appointed to assist or make a decision with or for the service user, unless it is not appropriate or practicable to do so
- h. act in good faith and for the benefit of the service user
- i. consider all other relevant circumstances
- j. consider whether to seek the views of the service user's carers, any person with an interest in the welfare of the service user, or other professionals
- k. consider the likelihood that the service user will regain capacity and the urgency of making the intervention prior to such recovery
- l. follow applicable law, regulations and guidance issued by appropriate authorities.

13. Communicate effectively with service users and others involved in their care

13.1 You must:

- a. identify yourself to service users before you provide any professional service to them
- b. communicate sensitively, effectively, honestly, and appropriately with service users, taking into account the particular needs of children and vulnerable adults

- c. ensure that services are put in place so that you can communicate effectively with service users, avoiding the use of family members as interpreters as far as possible
- d. use language that is clear and easy to understand
- e. respond to service users' questions professionally, honestly and openly
- f. communicate clearly and effectively with other members of the team involved in the care of the service user in order to ensure the safety and continuity of care.

14. Act in accordance with the principles of open disclosure

14.1 You must:

- a. ensure that if a service user suffers an adverse event that may have caused them harm, they are informed by a responsible person promptly, openly and honestly about what happened, how it happened, their condition and their ongoing care plan
- b. respond courteously and honestly to anyone who complains about the care, treatment or other services they have received
- c. promote and support a culture of open disclosure in your workplace and practice
- d. where you become aware that an adverse event has occurred to a service user, and the service user has not been informed, act by reporting in writing the matter to an appropriate person and request the open disclosure policy be implemented.

14.2 You should:

- a. provide information about relevant complaints mechanisms if requested.

15. Assist, advise and support colleagues, recently qualified registrants and students

You should:

- a. assist, advise and support colleagues, recently qualified registrants and students in your profession to develop the professional skills, values, attributes, attitudes and behaviour they will need when dealing with service users and staff.

16. Teach, supervise and assess students and other professionals

When you are involved in teaching, supervision and assessment:

16.1 You must:

- a. do so fairly and respectfully using agreed criteria

16.2 You should:

- a. meet your professional obligation to teach, train and mentor other Optometrists in specified practice areas.

17. Supervise tasks that you delegate to others

17.1 You must:

- a. acknowledge that service users have the right to assume that the person providing assessment, intervention, treatment or service to them has the knowledge, skills and competence to do so
- b. only delegate to a person who you believe to have the knowledge, skills, competence, and experience to carry out the task safely and effectively or to a person who is appropriately supervised
- c. understand that you are accountable for any task you delegate to another practitioner and that you are responsible for any task you delegate to a student or to another person

- d. understand that if a student or another professional is unwilling to carry out a task because they do not think they are capable of doing so safely and effectively, you must not force them to do so. If their refusal raises a disciplinary or training issue, you must deal with this separately. The service user must never be put at unnecessary risk.

17.2 You must not:

- a. ask anyone to do anything which is outside their knowledge, skills, competence, and experience unless they are supervised in that task by an experienced practitioner.

18. Keep accurate records

You must:

- a. keep clear and accurate and up-to-date records in line with the policies and procedures set out in your workplace or as dictated by relevant guidelines or legislation
- b. make sure that all records are:
 - > complete,
 - > legible (if handwritten)
 - > identifiable as being made by you, using your registered name and registration number
 - > dated and timed
 - > completed as soon as practicable following assessment, intervention or treatment, and
 - > clear and factual
- c. if you supervise students, review each student's entries in the records and record that you have done so
- d. store and use records according to data protection legislation, and other relevant legislation and policies governing your practice

- e. protect information in records against loss, damage or access by anyone who is not allowed to access them
- f. make sure that if records are updated, previously recorded information is retained
- g. understand that service users generally have a right to obtain copies of their records, subject to certain limited exceptions
- h. ensure that records are retrievable for service users throughout the designated retention period.

Records are all information collected, processed and held in manual, electronic or any other format pertaining to the service user and service user care. Records include data, demographics, clinical data, images, unique identification, investigation, samples, correspondence and communications relating to service users and their care.

19. Address health, safety and welfare risks

You must:

- a. follow risk assessment policies and procedures to assess potential risks in the workplace and your areas of practice
- b. take any steps needed to minimise, reduce or eliminate the risks you identify
- c. inform colleagues and the authorities about the outcomes and implications of risk assessments
- d. read, understand and comply with your organisation's safety statement
- e. where, in your professional judgment a service user poses a risk to your safety, take appropriate measures to protect yourself and others and make reasonable efforts, if appropriate, to go ahead with the assessment, intervention, treatment or service of the service user.

20. Raise concerns about safety and quality of care

You must:

- a. put the safety and well-being of service users before professional or other loyalties
- b. inform an appropriate person or authority if you are aware of systems or service structures that lead to unsafe practices which put service users, yourself or others at risk
- c. raise the issue outside of the organisation if your concerns are not resolved despite reporting them to an appropriate person or authority
- d. act to prevent any immediate risk to a service user by notifying the relevant authorities of any concerns you have about service user safety as soon as possible
- e. report any serious breaches of behaviour or malpractice by yourself or others. Malpractice includes negligence, incompetence, breach of contract, unprofessional behaviour, causing danger to health, safety or the environment, and covering up any of those issues.

21. Maintain adequate professional indemnity insurance

You must:

- a. ensure that you maintain adequate professional indemnity cover for any assessment, intervention, treatment or service you provide or have provided.

Ethics

You must always maintain a high standard of ethics.

22. Demonstrate ethical awareness

22.1 You must:

- a. carry out your duties and responsibilities in a professional and ethical way to protect the public
- b. always behave with integrity and honesty
- c. make sure you read, understand and comply with this Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics
- d. understand that if there is a conflict between this Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics and your work environment, your obligation is to this Code.

22.2 You should:

- a. be aware of the wider need to use limited resources as efficiently and responsibly as is practicable. You have a duty to assist in the efficient and effective use of resources and to give advice on their appropriate allocation, whilst balancing your duty of care to the service user.

23. Respect the rights and dignity of service users

23.1 You must:

- a. always show, through your practice and conduct, respect for the rights and dignity of all individuals.

23.2 You must not:

- a. discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against a person on the basis of:
 - > gender,
 - > family status,
 - > civil status,
 - > age,
 - > disability,
 - > sexual orientation,
 - > religion,
 - > race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins, or
 - > membership of the Traveller Community
- b. condone discrimination by others.

24. Avoid conflicts of interest

24.1 You must not:

- a. accept inducements, financial or other incentives that could reasonably be perceived as affecting your professional judgment
- b. for reasons of personal or commercial benefit, direct public service users to private practice
- c. enter into any agreement or contract that might cause you to breach this Code.

25. Undertake research in an ethical manner

When you engage in research

25.1 You must:

- a. submit your research proposal to the relevant research ethics committee and get ethical approval before starting the research or, where there is no relevant research ethics committee in place, ensure that your research conforms to the current version of the Declaration of Helsinki
- b. follow guidance laid down in legislation and issued by relevant authorities
- c. obtain voluntary, informed consent from service users in line with the procedures laid down by the research ethics committee
- d. collect, protect and destroy data in line with relevant legislation
- e. ensure that a service user's refusal to take part in research does not influence the delivery of service to that service user in any way
- f. make sure that, if you receive any payment or other financial benefit directly or indirectly from a pharmaceutical, medical device or other commercial organisation to conduct research, this does not influence the design or interpretation of your research
- g. address any potential conflict of interest and disclose any payment or benefit you have received from a pharmaceutical, medical device or other commercial organisation in any publication of research results
- h. follow accepted guidelines in scientific journals concerning intellectual property, copyright and acknowledging the work of others
- i. make sure you do not distort or misuse clinical or research findings.

25.2 You should:

- a. take part in research or support the research of others where possible
- b. make sure that the welfare of each research participant is not adversely affected
- c. disseminate or circulate the research findings widely to further the evidence base of the profession

26. Make sure that any advertising is truthful, accurate, lawful and not misleading

You must:

- a. make sure that any advertising is truthful, accurate, lawful and not misleading
- b. only advertise, promote or recommend a product or service that is based on your professional opinion as to service user needs
- c. provide full and accurate fee information to the service user in advance of agreeing to provide your service(s) or product(s).

Appendix A

Suggested procedure for decision-making

- Identify the problem and gather as much information as you can. Ask yourself if it is an ethical, professional, clinical or legal problem.
- Review the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics and identify the relevant parts. Check other professional guidelines too, such as those of the Health Service Executive or government departments, as well as any relevant legislation.
- Discuss the issue with professional colleagues being mindful of your obligation to respect the confidentiality of the service user.
- Consider asking your professional body for advice.
- Evaluate the rights, responsibilities and welfare of everyone affected. Remember that your first obligation is to the service user.
- Keep notes at each stage of the process.
- Consider different solutions and decisions.
- Evaluate and document the potential consequences of each option.
- Choose the best solution or decision based on your professional judgment.
- If you have any concerns about the legality of your chosen course of action, seek professional advice at the earliest opportunity.
- Put the solution or decision into practice, informing all the people affected.
- Remember that you are accountable, as an autonomous practitioner, for the consequences of the solution or decision that you choose.



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