

The Professional Standards Authority's view on a Common Code of Conduct for Health and Care Professionals

Position statement – November 2024

- 1.1 Codes of conduct set out expectations of professionals in terms of behaviour and ethics. As part of our role, we assess whether the professional regulators and Accredited Registers we oversee have appropriate codes of conduct in place.
- 1.2 In support of themes identified in our 2022 report *Safer Care for All*¹, we have reviewed the possible benefits of a common code of practice for health and social care professionals. We wanted to explore the potential of a common code to support retention, multi-disciplinary working, improved workplace culture, and consistency in regulatory decision-making while reducing complexity in the system.
- 1.3 Our review was based on qualitative research we commissioned by Solutions Research. This sought the views of the public, registrants and wider stakeholders on the potential benefits and risks of a common code of conduct. Non-clinical managers as well as practitioners on Accredited Registers were included in the scope of the research. We supplemented this research by conversations with the regulators we oversee, as well as other stakeholders.
- 1.4 The research found varied levels of support for a common code. Simplicity and consistency of standards of behaviour were seen as the key benefits of a common code and participants felt it would have the most impact on workplace culture, multi-disciplinary team working and patient safety. The key concern with a common code was how it could cover such a wide and disparate group of professionals without key requirements being diluted. Independently of the research itself, several of the regulators we oversee expressed concerns about the practicalities of implementation and, for some, a desire to recognise the differences between professions.
- 1.5 Consequently, we have concluded that the work required to overcome these challenges would not be justified by the potential benefits of a common code at this time. Instead, we suggest that similar benefits could be achieved through judicious selection of and issuing of joint statements when relevant, along the lines of the joint statements on the Duty of Candour and Conflicts of Interests.² There are likely to be benefits to patients and service users of these statements also being used by Accredited Registers.

¹ https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/publications/thought-paper/safer-care-for-all-solutions-from-professional-regulation-and-beyond.pdf?sfvrsn=9364b20_7

² Conflict of interest joint statement: www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/other-publications/conflicts-of-interest-joint-statement.pdf

Duty of candour joint statement: www.psni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Joint-statement-on-the-professional-duty-of-candour-FINAL.pdf

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- 1.6 These joint statements could focus on standards of conduct, behaviour and ethics where consistency of approach and language are particularly valuable for patient and service user safety. Examples of where this could potentially add value are informed consent and tackling workplace discrimination. They could also be useful in achieving a consistent approach in relation to emerging areas of risk, such as a learning response to patient/service user safety incidents; or evolving areas of practice such as the ethical use of AI.
 - 1.7 We will now consider how we take this forward, and how we prioritise areas of practice to add the most value, working closely with interested stakeholders, including the public, regulators and Accredited Registers.