

THE PHARMACIST'S FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS

ADOPTED BY THE APhA AND NASPA BOARDS JUNE 2021

PREAMBLE

As members of the patient-centered health care team, pharmacists are accountable for the appropriate use of medications to treat acute and chronic conditions and population health-programs that work to prevent medication and health related misadventures. Pharmacists improve patient outcomes by assuming responsibility for:

- Appropriate use of medications using evidence-based guidelines.
- Facilitating achievement of patients' health and medication-related goals.
- Promoting prevention and wellness strategies that improve patient health and overall health outcomes.
- Designing and overseeing safe, accurate, and timely medication distribution systems.
- Providing high-quality, compassionate, cost-effective care.¹

These principles and the document as a whole, prepared and supported by pharmacists, are intended to state publicly the fundamental rights that are essential to fulfill their professional responsibilities as outlined in the *Oath of a Pharmacist* and the *Pharmacist Code of Ethics* and states' scope of pharmacy practice. These principles are established to guide pharmacists in relationships with employers, patients, and health professionals; and, guide those individuals responsible for establishing federal and state laws/regulations/guidance that govern pharmacy practice and healthcare delivery. These principles were developed as a tool to initiate and facilitate conversations between pharmacy staff and their employers.

PRINCIPLES

PHARMACISTS HAVE THE FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY:

I. To practice with honesty and integrity.

A pharmacist places the health and well-being of the patient and community at the center of their professional practice. A pharmacist has a duty to fulfill their professional responsibilities as outlined in the *Oath of a Pharmacist*, *Pharmacist Code of Ethics*, and scope of practice requirements.

II. To seek employment that aligns with their professional goals and personal values and needs.

Pharmacists must be thoughtful when considering their personal professional goals, values, needs as they explore and review *potential* career opportunities. Pharmacists must also research and consider the work environment, values, and organizational goals of potential employers to understand how well they align with their own when *evaluating* employment opportunities.

III. To be lifelong learners to maintain professional competency and engage in the profession.

Recognizing that health care practice and therapeutics are constantly evolving, pharmacists have an obligation to pursue meaningful continuing professional development and education in order to maintain and optimize their clinical knowledge and abilities. Pharmacists must also have the support of their employer in order to pursue these opportunities.

IV. To educate their patients and the public to enhance public health.

Pharmacists are often the most accessible health care professionals in their communities and are essential to help educate patients to optimize use of their medications and achieve optimal health outcomes. Pharmacists bridge gaps in patient care throughout the health care delivery system.

Pharmacists also play an active role in reinforcing consistent and reliable public health messages while helping to provide accurate health-related information to our patients in an era of abundantly available misinformation.

V. To make decisions and seek resolutions regarding workplace concerns without fear of intimidation or retaliation from their employer or supervisors.

Pharmacists have the responsibility to identify, address, and when needed elevate concerns regarding workplace issues that may compromise the safety, health or well-being of the pharmacy personnel or patients they serve. Employers and supervisors have a corresponding responsibility to encourage pharmacists and other pharmacy personnel to raise concerns about, and offer solutions to, maintain high-quality patient care and working conditions without fear of retaliation or intimidation from employers or supervisors.

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¹ Based on the Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners Vision for Pharmacy Practice (Adopted 2014).

PHARMACISTS HAVE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT:

- I. To practice pharmacy in the best interest of patient and community health and well-being.**
A pharmacist must consider the rules and regulations intended to protect the health and well-being of patients and communities while also using professional judgment in their decision making process.
- II. To exercise professional judgment under the auspices of their license when delivering care to patients.**
Pharmacists must have the independence to use their education and knowledge to make professional clinical decisions in the best interest of their patients. To mitigate incidents of moral distress², pharmacists should never be placed in a situation where they are forced to take part in patient care activities or decisions that they do not believe are in the best interest of the patient's health and/or well-being or that are in violation of pharmacy laws and/or regulations.
- III. To be treated in a considerate, respectful, and professional manner by patients and supported by employers and supervisors.**
Pharmacists should not be subject to behavior or work conditions that impede their independent professional judgment, or actions that compromise the best interests of the health and well-being of their patients or their status as a healthcare professional.
- IV. To a workplace free of racism, discrimination, bullying, or harassment, as well as physical, verbal, or emotional abuse.**
Pharmacists' workplaces should be free of discriminatory practices including but not limited to, physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, racism, discrimination, harassment, or bullying.
- V. To a working environment where the necessary resources are allocated to provide both legally required patient care services, as well as any additional enhanced patient care services offered.**
Pharmacy is a highly-regulated profession which includes specific state and federal legal requirements that must be met when taking care of patients. At a minimum, sufficient time and adequate staffing are needed to safely adhere to the basic legal requirements before adding enhanced patient care services (e.g., vaccine administration, Medication Therapy Management (MTM), collaborative practice services). In addition, pharmacists should have ready access to current information and appropriate clinical and therapeutic references to support their delivery of patient care.
- VI. To reasonable working hours and conditions.**
Pharmacists must be permitted and encouraged to take needed breaks as well as sufficient, appropriate staff to safely complete the tasks at hand. Pharmacists should have access to tools when needed to promote and maintain physical and mental health (i.e., ergonomic work tools, stool or chair, cushioned floor mat when standing for long periods, appropriate lighting, access to appropriate restroom and lactation facilities, access to sustenance throughout the day).
- VII. To have a voice in the development of metrics, and how those metrics are used as criteria for performance evaluations of all pharmacy staff.**
Pharmacists should be evaluated fairly, with performance metrics and indicators that are focused on quality patient care while assuring adequate staffing is provided to meet those metrics and ensure patient safety by preventing medication errors. Meaningful performance metrics should address the quality of care provided to patients that pharmacists can directly impact and not only the cost or efficiency of services or operations.

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² In 1984, Andrew Jameton coined the term moral distress as the negative feelings a nurse feels when one knows the morally correct action to take but is constrained in some way from taking this action. It is different from burnout because it deals with your moral responsibility in a situation that you evaluate and determine the right course of action and then are prevented from doing it. *The American Journal of Nursing* (July 2016) suggests that moral distress can lead to "debilitating frustration, anger, and guilt." This article indicates that system-based sources of moral distress include "restrictive institutional policies, power structures, and regulatory practices, as well as limited human and material resources." Only in the last few years have publications explored moral distress in other health care professionals.