

# Code of Ethics

## Introduction

The primary concern of all health care professionals is to ensure the best interests of their patients and clients are served in the course of practice. The decisions practitioners make relevant to their own actions and behaviour must also be based on the corollary benefit that will be derived by those served. Some of these decisions are complex and involve an ethical component. A code of ethics—a document comprising a set of behavioural principles—directs and guides health care practitioners in their efforts to protect the public interest by ensuring the delivery of safe, effective, and ethical services by practicing professionals.

The Nova Scotia College of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Professionals (NSCMIRTP) has developed its *Code of Ethics* to provide such direction and guidance to all Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Professionals (MIRTPs), not only to MIRTPs who provide clinical services, but also to administrators; educators; researchers; imaging informatics technologists and any other MIRTP providing non-direct patient-care services.

The *Code of Ethics* will be used in conjunction with the profession's *Standards of Practice*. Together, these documents set the professional expectations that registrants must meet in providing safe, effective, and ethical services.

## Ethical Obligations of the Profession

By choosing to become MIRTPs, registrants commit themselves to providing services that are in the interest of their patients or clients rather than in their own self-interest. Along with the privilege of working in a self-regulating profession, MIRTPs have specific ethical responsibilities to honour this commitment.

Health care professionals have specialized knowledge and skills that create an inherent imbalance in the practitioner/patient relationship. This makes patients potentially vulnerable to behaviours or actions by those professionals that could compromise the patient's best interests. Each MIRTP is therefore personally responsible for complying with the ethical principles set down in the Code of Ethics.

### **Purpose and Use of the Code**

The primary purpose of this *Code of Ethics* is to guide MIRTPs in identifying and managing ethical dilemmas that arise in practice. It does so by providing a framework that clearly articulates the principles on which professional values are based.

MIRTPs should refer to the *Code of Ethics* to evaluate their own professional conduct as it relates to patients, health care consumers, employers, colleagues, and other members of the health care team.

The Code will be used by NSCMIRTP Committees when called upon to make rulings about ethical issues in cases of alleged professional misconduct, incompetence, or incapacity.

The Code will also serve as an educational resource for:

- professional development, self-evaluation, and peer review; and
- facilitating public education about and awareness of what to expect from MIRTPs.

### **Overview of the Code**

The *Code of Ethics* comprises behavioural examples for each of the following four guiding principles:

1. Beneficence (client well-being);
2. Non-maleficence (do not harm and prevent harm from occurring);
3. Justice (Respect for Persons and Right); and
4. Fidelity (Accountability).

## **The Code of Ethics**

In fulfilling their professional promise to serve the best interests of the public, MIRTPs must abide by the following ethical principles of behaviour. Each principle is followed by a set of indicators, against which their actions might be measured.

### **Beneficence (Client well-being)**

The ethical principle of *Beneficence* refers to the MIRTP's moral obligation to directly or indirectly serve and benefit the patient by making decisions and taking actions that are *in the patient's best interest*.

MIRTPs uphold this principle when they:

- Make decisions that are founded in credible and evidence-informed information.
- Take the appropriate steps to optimize imaging while applying the ALARA principles.
- Apply professional judgement and skill when administering substances.
- Make required modifications to the services, equipment, and the patient's surroundings to address the patient's personal situation, including emotions, fears, anxiety, illness, and disabilities.
- Take steps to promote positive patient outcomes and timely access to care and services.
- Demonstrate effective communication skills to support continuity of care and to ensure patient needs are met.
- Share evidence-based knowledge to inform patient care decisions and to support advancements in practice and the profession.
- Advocate for, participate in, or conduct research following ethical research standards and protocols.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer by participating in the education and mentoring of staff members, colleagues and students.
- Represent the best interest of the public when engaged in quality control activities, product development and testing, and equipment purchases.

### **Non-Maleficence (Do not harm and prevent harm from occurring)**

The ethical principle of *Non-Maleficence* refers to the MIRTP's obligation to avoid harming the patient, self, and others, and also to protect the patient, self, and others from harm.

MIRTPs uphold this principle when they:

- Refrain from participating in behaviours that could result in harm to the patient, self or others.
- Anticipate safety concerns and take action to ensure the safety of others when in the practice setting or in areas under the MIRTPs' responsibility.
- Take action in a situation that requires immediate attention or when the patient requires urgent care (e.g.: quality control testing, equipment malfunction, critical incidents, near misses, identified abnormalities on a scan, omissions in a report, pain management, toileting needs, allergic or adverse reactions).
- Identify and manage any potential, perceived, or real conflicts of interest and ensure the patient relationship is not exploited for personal gain or interest (physical, financial, social).
- Ensure transparent communications with patients, substitute decision-makers, patient advocates, and other professionals.
- Follow applicable safety legislation /codes, regulations, and organizational policies.

- Challenge the judgment of others if they reasonably believe that their actions could harm or adversely affect the patient or others.
- Refer to others when patient care needs are beyond personal competence or professional scope of practice.
- Follow infection-control measures as defined in the *Standards of Practice*.
- Bring concerns to the appropriate authority if they reasonably believe human resources, policies, procedures, working conditions, professional performance or health of others may compromise patient care or public safety.
- Assign appropriate tasks to those who are competent and skilled in performing the tasks.
- Identify and maintain professional boundaries as defined in the Standards of Practice.
- Do not under any circumstances participate in sexual behaviour with a patient, as defined by the regulatory body.
- Do not under any circumstances participate in any form of harassment, including but not limited to:
  - i. Bullying or intimidating behaviour;
  - ii. Making offensive jokes or innuendos;
  - iii. Displaying or circulating offensive images or materials;
  - iv. Engaging in offensive or intimidating communications (phone calls, emails, text messages, social media posts etc.).
- Report unethical, incompetent, or capacity issues that affect the safe delivery of patient services and care to the appropriate authorities.

### **Justice (Respect for persons and rights)**

The ethical principle of *Justice*, or the *Respect for Persons and Rights* refers to the MIRTP's obligation to be compassionate and considerate to all persons, and to respect a person's legal and ethical rights to receive confidential, fair, impartial, and unbiased treatment in the delivery of care and services.

MIRTPs comply with this principle when they:

- Respect the person's right to privacy and confidentiality by preventing unauthorized or accidental disclosure of confidential personal information.
- Demonstrate compassion and understanding in sensitive situations.
- Honour and respect patients' choice(s), even if patients' wishes are not in their best interest or place a greater burden on the health care system.

- Obtain the patient's or substitute decision-maker's implied or expressed consent to the service and respect the patient's right to accept or refuse the proposed procedure or treatment, without judgment.
- Include the patient in the process by explaining their actions, next steps, and follow-up care.
- Demonstrate fair, impartial, and unbiased scheduling of patient services and appointments, and provide an ethical rationale when deviation from normal scheduling is required (e.g. emergency or urgent care needs arise).
- Provide fair, unbiased, and equitable services regardless of the patient's situation, social-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, values and beliefs, disability or disease state.
- Respect the vulnerability and dignity of the patient by ensuring privacy when undressing, dressing, and during a procedure.
- Demonstrate honesty and trustworthy behaviours and professionalism when interacting with patients, colleagues, other professionals, and the general public or society.
- Demonstrate unbiased and non-judgmental behaviours when interacting with patients, families, colleagues, and others.
- Demonstrate patient/family-centered care by employing cultural sensitivity.
- Respect the patient's needs for comfort prior to and during the services (e.g. pain management, toileting, warmth, dressing), and reschedule the procedure or treatment if patient's care needs cannot be met at that time.
- Identify and show compassion for the patient's phobias and anxiety and take necessary steps to address them.
- Work collaboratively and respectfully with others on the health care team.
- Demonstrate respect for others' opinions and professional knowledge, skill, and judgement.
- Make recommendations for and support change in the health care system.

### **Fidelity (Accountability)**

The ethical principle of *Accountability* (Fidelity) refers to the MIRTP's fiduciary duty to engage in professional behaviours that maintain public trust in the profession.

MIRTPs comply with this principle when they:

- Take responsibility for the treatment, procedure, or services through to completion of services or to an appropriate point of hand-off or transfer of care.
- Practise in only the discipline(s) for which their licence has been issued and within the registrant's individual sphere of practice.

- Critically evaluate their own knowledge, skill and judgment, actions, patient and client outcomes, and feedback from others.
- Recognize and take appropriate action when personal emotions, mental capacity, or life situations impact work performance and patient safety.
- Provide professional services only when free from the influence of alcohol, drugs or other substances, or any condition that might impede the safe delivery of care.
- Maintain and strive to enhance the required knowledge, skill and judgment to provide competent care, including when changes occur regarding any of the following: role and responsibilities; organizational or system policies; equipment and software; patient care needs; and demographics.
- Refuse to perform an activity that is beyond personal competence or outside of scope of practice, referring patient to appropriate professional to ensure healthcare needs are met.
- Comply with professional Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and relevant legislation, regulations, guidelines, safety codes, and organizational policies and procedures.
- Contribute to the development of the art and science of medical radiation technology through continuing education and research.
- Recognize that self-regulation is a privilege and with this privilege comes professional obligations to uphold a professional image, public trust, and confidence, and to engage in regulatory programs (e.g. continuing competence program).
- Strive to achieve excellence in the profession.