

Code of Ethics

Osteopathic Council Code of Ethics

Section 118 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 requires the Osteopathic Council to set standards of clinical competence, cultural competence, and ethical conduct to be observed by the profession. This document addresses the latter.

This Code of Ethics has a number of goals. It is intended to provide a common standard for all osteopaths to follow. It also is intended to provide a benchmark for the public on the standard of practice they can expect from an osteopath.

This Code will also be used by the Osteopathic Council's Professional Conduct committee, along with other relevant legislation such as the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers Rights, as a tool for adjudicating on complaints and competence issues.

The osteopath must:

1. Make the care of the patient their main concern

The quality of the relationship between the osteopath and their patient is a major determinant of successful treatment. Osteopaths as health professionals must set boundaries for their practice that ensure patients feel informed, acknowledged, respected, valued and safe.

2. Ensure Informed Consent is always used

Ensure patients are fully informed of their rights. The treatment of a patient is only permitted with his or her informed consent. Care should be taken in explaining the diagnosis and treatment proposed in language that the patient can easily understand.

Informed consent applies to every part of an osteopath's interaction with a patient including case history taking, physical examination, decisions arising from a diagnosis, advice regarding possible adverse reactions to treatment, lifestyle changes proposed, referrals prescribed and further treatment.

When a patient is under the age of 16 years, particular care must be taken to ensure that the patient's parent or guardian fully understands the nature of the diagnosis and treatment proposed, and consents to the treatment being administered. In rare circumstances a patient under the age of 16 may be able to give informed consent, however if doubt exists then consent must be obtained from the patient's parent or guardian.

Ensure that information on patient's rights (ie. the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights) is readily displayed and available in clinics.

3. Assist the patient's understanding of the nature, purposes, benefits and limitations of Osteopathy

Provide patients with information on osteopathy.

4. Understand the concept of duty of care and associated responsibilities

In order to ensure clear boundaries are established around their practise, osteopaths must conduct themselves in an honourable and professional manner when dealing with their patients, the public and with other members of the profession. Objectivity must be maintained and personal beliefs not be allowed to influence professional opinions.

Accurately record client information and interventions to facilitate the care, treatment and support of the patient.

5. Not overstate or exaggerate the seriousness of a patient's condition and only perform or participate in procedures that are within his or her competence and can be clinically justified.

6. Disclose any significant proprietary interest they have in any care options recommended.

7. Always respect their patient's rights, dignity, autonomy and requirements for continuity of care.

This also includes respecting a patient's right to refuse treatment.

8. Respect the confidentiality of the information received in the course of the professional consultation, only disclosing information when the patient consents or the law requires. All such disclosures should be in writing only and a patient file copy made.

All information concerning patients (patient records, case history notes, appointment records, etc.) must be kept confidential by all those involved in the osteopathic clinic. Patient information may only be provided if the patient consents to the release of the information or the law allows it, or the law requires it. If the latter, advice should be sought before this decision is made.

9. Act with propriety in, and not breach, the trust arising from the professional relationship with patients.

Ensure that the relationship with patients remains professional. In particular, the language used in questioning, explaining the condition diagnosed, advising the patient or explaining the treatment proposed must be as clear as possible.

10. Not exploit patients in any way.

In particular, there must be no sexual relationship, nor inappropriate sexual behaviour, with a patient during the professional relationship. Inappropriate sexual behaviour includes, but is not limited to, the use of language (whether spoken or written) of a sexual nature, the use of visual material of a sexual nature, or physical behaviour of a sexual nature.

11. Respect every patients' right to be treated by an osteopath whose professional ability is in no way impaired by any mental condition, physical condition, alcohol or illicit drugs that could undermine the practitioner's fitness and competence to practice safely with the public.

12. Operate osteopathic practices in a professional manner.

Ensure clinics are operated in a professional manner, particularly in terms of cleanliness, hygiene and privacy of consultation areas.

Make provision for the continuing care of patients during his or her absence from practice where possible.

- 13. Not undertake research or other studies involving people without the research or study protocol being approved by a properly constituted ethics committee for that purpose and without the full knowledge and consent of those involved in the research.**
- 14. Be aware of and use appropriate avenues under current legislation (eg. the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003) or professional protocols / rules for raising concerns about a colleague's professional ability.**
- 15. Accurately inform interested parties, including patients, health practitioners and the Osteopathic Council, about their qualifications and competence and the work they are undertaking to maintain competence.**