

Code of Ethics & Statement of Professional Conduct

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Association for Nutrition 28 Portland Place, London W1B 1LY
Registered Charity No. 1136624 Registered Company No. 6488331

Code of Ethics

The following text provides a framework standard of conduct that all Registered Nutritionists and Associate Nutritionists must agree to accept before they are admitted to, or can remain on, the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN).

1. Promote the advancement of the science of nutrition, the application of that science to human and/or animal health and well being, and education in all aspects of pure and applied nutrition.
2. At all times, seek to reflect credit on the profession of nutrition.
3. At all times, seek to maintain the highest standards of professionalism and scientific integrity.
4. Seek to extend the usefulness and sphere of influence of the profession.
5. Respect any confidence gained in the course of any professional activity or relating to the profession or its members.
6. Be objective, fair, balanced and proportionate in any professional statements or recommendations.
7. Avoid unwarranted comment on the character, competence or integrity of other members of the profession.
8. Recognise a responsibility for the professional guidance of direct subordinates, students and trainees.
9. Seek to maintain and enhance their professional competence by updating and improving their personal knowledge of a proficiency in the field.
10. Support fellow registrants who may find themselves in difficulty as a result of adherence to this Code.
11. Collaborate constructively with other organisations and individuals who share the Association's objectives.

Statement of Professional Conduct

Statements of Professional Conduct are designed to help registrants by making explicit how being a registered professional contributes to the protection of the general public and clients, whether human or animal.

In this context, 'clients' is taken to refer to any individuals or groups of individuals or population groups, be they students, trainees, subjects or participants or their carers, for whom the registrant holds responsibility by virtue of the provision of professional services or professional advice.

Principle 1

The goal of all professionals in nutrition is to apply their knowledge and skills in nutrition in order to promote the health and well being of humans, or the health and welfare of companion animals, or the welfare and productivity of livestock and large animals, safely, effectively and professionally.

This is achieved by:

- a. Setting, promoting and protecting high standards of services, education and training in nutrition delivered within recognised occupational boundaries and/ or by multi-skilling.
- b. Promoting professional development of individuals to maintain and raise standards of service.
- c. Providing leadership in nutrition, in multidisciplinary team work or multi-skilling or individual work.
- d. Accepting individual responsibility.
- e. Exercising high standards of objectivity and integrity in acquiring, reporting, discussing, collating and disseminating or interpreting research findings; in using research in the development of an evidence base, and in formulating commercial or public policy that is based upon or derives from such evidence.

Recognising the scope and limits of one's own competence is an essential aspect of professionalism that is expected of a Registered Nutritionist or Associate Nutritionist who works within the Association's Code of Ethics. It is also essential that all registrants conform to the letter and spirit of relevant laws for Data Protection and for the protection of consumers/clients.

Registrants are required to make all reasonable efforts to conform to the provisions of codes of practice for advertising and the promotion of sales of products or services, set by the Association, and, in the case of registrants with multiple registrations, other professional bodies. Registrants may not use the Association for Nutrition logo upon their websites, brochures, letterhead or other documents.

The registrant is expected to demonstrate:

- a. Confident understanding of the ethics and values of professionalism relevant to their occupation or sector of work.
- b. Benefit from undertaking independent continuous development by engaging in formal events such as organising or actively participating in scientific or professional meetings, case conferences, workshops and journal clubs, among many other relevant activities.

- c. Insight needed to work appropriately within professional boundaries, to refuse to undertake a task, client or service beyond the registrant's competency, or to make appropriate referrals to a proficient professional.

Principle 2

It is the prime duty of nutrition professionals in all circumstances to safeguard the health and welfare of all who use or need their services, while respecting individual rights to make free and informed choices.

The purpose of this statement is to set out the standards of good character, conduct and health to which all registrants and prospective registrants must commit themselves. It is also the standard against which the Association will assess complaints made against a registrant.

A registrant who breaches the standards set out in this Statement is at risk of being removed from the Register.

Basic Standards of Good Character and Conduct Applicable to All Registrants

This summary statement of basic standards applies to all registrants in all appropriate circumstances. It supplements full statements by relevant statutory bodies, such as the Health Professions Council, that apply to all registered professionals controlled under statute (The Health Professions Order, 2001).

It is the prime duty of all registrants, whether in front line health care delivery services or not, to safeguard the health and welfare of those who use or need their services, or advice, while respecting the evidence on which these are based and the rights of all individuals to make free and informed choices. In light of the prime duty outlined above, registrants must always:

- a. Demonstrate adequate knowledge, objectivity and integrity in respect of the externally verifiable evidence on which their research, teaching, advice, communication or practice is based
- b. Act in the best interests of clients and exercise professional judgment (see below) to balance the interests of individual clients with the interests of others (e.g. employer, carer, the public health)
- c. Discharge their duties in a professional and ethical manner
- d. Recognise and respect clients as partners in their service
- e. Demonstrably keep their professional knowledge and skills up to date
- f. Behave with integrity and probity
- g. Act within the limits of their knowledge, skills and experience and, if necessary, refer on to another proficient professional
- h. Maintain proper and effective communications with clients, carers and other professionals
- i. Respect client confidentiality;
- j. Maintain accurate records of their professional activities
- k. Effectively supervise tasks delegated by them to others
- l. Limit or cease their practice if their performance or judgement is affected by their health
- m. Avoid bringing their profession into disrepute
- n. Disclose to the Association any information relevant to their conduct or competence

Principle 3

The welfare of clients and the public. Registrants must discharge their duties and responsibilities in a professional and ethical manner. Clients are entitled to receive good and safe standards of practice.

The Statement is intended to protect the public from unprofessional and unethical behaviour, by seeking to ensure that such standards are inculcated into prospective registrants and maintained by those in practice. These standards are required primarily for the protection of the public rather than for the benefit of registrants.

The following fundamental principles are paramount:

- a. A registrant must respect and reflect the balance and reliability of the scientific evidence that underpins their research, practice, teaching, advice and communication to others. They must demonstrate objectivity in assessing evidence and not mislead others as to the evidence available by omission, exaggeration or ignorance
- b. Registrants must at all times act in and safeguard the interests of clients, carers and other members of the public, and must seek to provide the best possible service, either alone or in partnership with other professions
- c. A registrant must not, by any act or omission, cause anything to be done which he or she has reasonable grounds for believing is likely to endanger or to affect adversely the health or safety of an individual or group of clients or a community or population
- d. Registrants must ensure that they behave with integrity and probity, adhere to accepted standards of personal and professional conduct, and do not engage in any behaviour or activity likely to bring their profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in that profession
- e. Registrants must ensure that their knowledge, skills and performance are of a high quality, up-to-date, and relevant to their field of practice
- f. 'High quality' knowledge here means externally verifiable evidence from peer reviewed journals, meta-analysis or systematic reviews or consensus reports from national or international expert committees, such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the World Health Organisation, respectively
- g. In the absence of such evidence, work at the cutting edge of innovation in creative new knowledge, services, or developing health improvement, should be based upon established precept and biologically plausible mechanisms
- h. Practising nutritionists should be able to show that they work according to prevailing consensus among peers in their field. Consensus could include standards set locally or by specialist or special interest groups

Principle 4

Scope of practice. Registrants must confine themselves to practice in those fields in which they have appropriate education, training and experience, and, where applicable, abide by the scope of practice laid down in any code of professional conduct of their respective statutory or professional body.

Principle 5

Advertising by registrants in respect of professional activities must be accurate and restrained. Advertisements should not be misleading, deceptive, self-laudatory, unfair or sensational and, in particular, should not make claims in respect of superiority of personal skills, equipment or facilities. Professional signs must be dignified and restrained.

Registrants who are involved in the promotion or advertising of any product or service must ensure that their scientific knowledge and professional skills and experience are used in an accurate and professionally responsible manner. They must not make or support unjustifiable statements relating to particular proprietary products or use a single brand name as the sole description of a product when giving advice or making recommendations to clients. Registrants are encouraged to refer clients or employers to the Association's website to check on registration status or to find out more about the Association's register. However, registrants who have their own personal websites must not include the Association's logo, nor must they use the Association's logo or name in any leaflet, letterhead brochure etc, without explicit consent.

Principle 6

Confidentiality. Registrants must treat information about clients as confidential and use it only for the purpose for which it was given. They must not knowingly disclose to any client or to any other unauthorised person, the result of any investigations or any other information of a personal or confidential nature gained in the course of practice in their profession. Registrants must only use information about a client for the purpose of that appropriate service to the client or for purposes which the client has given specific consent to and consistent with the provisions of any data protection legislation.

Principle 7

Clients and members of the public receiving advice or other services from registered professionals are entitled to assume that the service will be provided by a person who has sufficient knowledge and skill for the practice of his/ her profession. Where tasks are delegated to a person other than the registered professional, such tasks should not require special expertise and skill for which that person has not been trained. Registered Nutritionists must continue to give adequate and appropriate supervision to the performance of those tasks that have been delegated. The registrant remains responsible for the outcome.

Conversely, a registrant may only undertake treatment, care or other duties or functions that require the knowledge and skills of a statutorily registered health professional or veterinarian, under the appropriate direction by the registered health professional or veterinarian. Normally, nutritionists work with healthy clients at low risk of co-morbidities, as set out in specific supplementary guidance for work with individuals. Associate Nutritionists are expected to work with appropriate professional support and supervision. Registered Nutritionists have systems and procedures to identify, recognise and record risk of co-morbidities and to know where, when and how to refer such individual clients appropriately and promptly. **Registered Nutritionists who are delegated to work with patients, should do so as part of a team or group, whether in research or in public health, under appropriate supervision by a regulated health professional or veterinarian.**

This statement is not intended to restrict the proper training of students or prevent multi-skilling by individuals or teams trained to perform specialised functions or to carry out procedures under appropriate supervision. Registrants are likely to respond to the demands for flexible, interdisciplinary work under NHS Modernisation and for multi-skilling in other sectors. Registrants should seek to provide professional leadership in the delivery and dissemination of learning, training, practice in and application of nutrition in their multi-disciplinary teams or multi skilled roles, wherever they work, in the public or private sectors.

Principle 8

Registrants must maintain high standards of personal conduct and scientific integrity. They must not engage in conduct which may adversely affect services to clients or confidence in a registrant or professional colleague or which brings a registrant or professional colleague into disrepute. Evidence of conviction of criminal offences should be disclosed to the Association. Failure to do so may lead to the rejection of an application for registration; those already registered may be removed. A registrant must co-operate with any investigation or formal inquiry into his or her professional conduct. Being removed from another voluntary or statutory register may lead to rejection or removal from the Association's register.

Principle 9

When accepting a client a registrant assumes a duty of care which includes the obligation to refer the client for further professional advice (or treatment) if it transpires that the service required exceeds the registrant's skills or experience or if such a course of action would be of greater benefit to the client's health and/or welfare. A client is entitled to a referral for a second opinion at any time. The registrant is under an obligation to accede to such a request promptly.

A Registered Nutritionist must ensure that a client who requests a service fully understands at the outset:

- a. the implications of limited compliance with advice or treatment, and
- b. that the service requested can only be provided if that service would be appropriate.

Otherwise, the registrant should refer the client to another appropriate professional. This applies to particularly vulnerable individuals or groups such as young people and children, elderly; or individuals or groups with any impairments or disability that require specialist skills or experience.

Principle 10

Making and keeping records is an essential part of service delivery and records must be maintained for all activities in the course of professional work. This is especially important for every client seeking professional advice or services. All such records must be legible, and entries should be written, signed and dated. Records should be supplemented and updated and contain a record of any arrangements made for the referrals or second opinions. Records should be safeguarded against loss, damage or use by unauthorised persons, and destroyed in an appropriate manner after an appropriate time period.

Principle 11

Registrants must recognise and respect clients and carers as partners and must be accountable for ensuring that they promote and protect the interests of their clients. They must respect and take account of these factors in providing services and must not in any way exploit or abuse the relationship with a client or carer. They must not allow their views about clients' gender, age, colour, race, disability, sexuality, social or economic status, lifestyle, culture or religious beliefs to prejudice the treatment or professional advice they provide. When working in a team, they remain accountable for their professional conduct, or the professional advice they provide, any omissions on their part, the quality of their performance, or the performance of junior members of their team under their supervision, or students under training or colleagues to whom they delegated tasks or duties. Registrants must act to protect clients when there is reason to believe that they are threatened by a colleague's conduct, performance or health. Registrants must ensure that they provide professional advice to senior members who have delegated tasks or duties to them and take steps to ensure that they perform delegated tasks or duties within their scope of practice. The safety and well-

being of clients is of paramount importance at all times and must over-ride personal and professional loyalties.

Any act of omission or commission by another registrant that may place a client at risk or that may fall below acceptable standards should be discussed with a senior professional colleague, or, if raising the matter with a senior colleague is thought inappropriate or is impossible, with the Registration Office.

Principle 12

Registered Nutritionists must take all reasonable steps to ensure that they can communicate accurately and effectively with clients. They must also communicate effectively, co-operate and share their knowledge and expertise with professional colleagues for the benefit of clients and the public.

Principle 13

A Registered Nutritionist or Associate Nutritionist has an obligation to work within the Association's Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct at all times, in any country. It is also essential that all registrants conform with the letter and spirit of relevant laws for the protection of data and for the protection of consumers, human and/or animal clients and make all reasonable efforts to conform to the provisions of this or other relevant professional codes for advertising or otherwise promoting sales or services within their country of residence. Statements of Conduct for statutory or chartered professions apply to registrants with dual registration.

Principle 14

*Registrants who hold multiple registrations, i.e. are also members of one or more chartered or state regulated profession as well as being registered with the Association, must conform with **all** the relevant statements of professional referral conduct.*

Principle 15

Registrants are bound by the Data Protection Act, the requirements for clinical governance, and other comparable regulations, in the UK and/or in their country of residence.

Notes

The Statement of Professional Conduct draws upon the following sources:

1. The first report of the Standards of Public Life Committee, the Nolan Committee, May 1995 CM580, www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/parlment/nolan/nolan.htm
2. Medical Research Council Good Research Practice, 2000 MRC Ethics Series http://www.mrc.ac.uk/index/publications/publications-ethics_and_best_practice.htm
3. Health Professions Council, Standards of conduct, performance and ethics: your duties as a registrant, 2003. www.hpc-uk.org

Also:

Quality Assurance Agency 'An emerging health professions framework. Expectations of the health professional in providing patient/ client services', in the Benchmark Statements for the Health Professionals, 2001, www.qaa.ac.uk.

4. World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki Ethical Principles for Medical research Involving Human Subjects, first initiated in 1964, <http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm>
5. Biotechnology and Biosciences Research Council BBSRC Research Grants:- the Guide, 2004. http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/research/grants_booklet.pdf
6. Webster, A et al, ESRC Developing a framework for Social Science Research Ethics, 2004, http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/ourresearch/research_ethics_framework.asp

Further information or advice

Registrants involved in services for individual humans and animals can pose questions or seek advice about the Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct to the Registration Office in the first instance at:

Association for Nutrition, 28 Portland Place, LONDON, W1B 1LY
professional@associationfornutrition.org

The Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct is subject to periodic review by the Registration Committee who will publish supplementary advice on the Association's website and in print.

Allegations or complaints against a Registrant

A brief guide to the procedures for investigating a complaint against a registrant with regard to deviations from this statement is published on the AfN website www.associationfornutrition.org