

Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for Optometrists subscribed by Optometry Confederation of India

Preface

Professional conduct of optometrists is the basis of how the whole profession is perceived by the public at large. All registered members of the Optometry Confederation of India must subscribe to it:

An optometrist is a healthcare professional and is defined by The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021 as

A professional “who studies, advises, researches, supervises or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic or promotional health services and who has obtained any qualification of degree under this Act”

The key principles which apply to Optometrists are:

1. The Optometrist should always have as his prime concern the welfare and safety of both patients and the public.
2. The Optometrist should ensure that he treats every patient politely and considerately.
3. The Optometrist shall obtain the valid consent of the patient before examination, treatment or involving patients in teaching and research.
4. The honor and dignity of the profession shall be upheld at all times and no activity shall be engaged in, such that might bring the profession into disrepute
5. Optometrists shall at all times have due regard to the laws and regulations applicable, and maintain a high standard of professional conduct. Any behavior which might impair confidence in the profession should be avoided.
6. Optometrists should respect patients' dignity and privacy. All information related to healthcare or welfare of any patient should be treated as confidential between practitioner and patient unless disclosure is specifically permitted by such patient or by law.
7. The optometrist should listen to patients, maintain good records and respect the patient's right to be fully involved in decisions about their care.
8. Optometrists should keep abreast of the progress of scientific and other relevant knowledge pertaining to eye and vision care so that they can provide services with professional competence and maintain a high standard of professional expertise.
9. Optometrists should act within the limits of their professional competence and cooperate and respect other professional colleagues and eye care service providers like ophthalmologists and opticians for the benefit of patients and the public.

10. Optometrists should not criticize or cast doubts on the integrity of other professional colleagues except when required by law for furnishing legal or disciplinary proceedings, or if the optometrist feels patient's welfare is being placed at risk through these actions of a professional colleague
11. Optometrists shall not engage in advice, prescribe, or engage in any procedure beyond his competence and training. Optometrists should be aware of their limitations and scope of practice and if needed, to refer patients to a more competent colleague or other healthcare professionals.
12. The Optometrist should ensure a safe environment for the patient complying with all the statutory requirements of health and safety as applicable in their place of practice.
13. The Optometrist shall show equality, value diversity and be inclusive in all their dealings and not discriminate on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief.
14. The Optometrist shall maintain appropriate professional boundaries with all those whom they come in contact with. The Optometrist must be aware of and comply with all legal obligations in relation to safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.
15. The Optometrist shall act with honesty and integrity to maintain public trust and confidence in his/her profession.
16. The Optometrist shall recognize and respect a patient's right to complain and ensure that the making of a complaint does not prejudice patient care. They should respond honestly, openly, politely and constructively to anyone who complains and apologies where appropriate.
17. The Optometrist should be open and honest in case of any lapse or errors in patient care, and take appropriate steps to minimize discomfort or distress to the patient.
18. In case of supervision of trainees, the Optometrist shall at all times abide by the laws of the Confederation and will take responsibility along with the trainee, for the care of the patient examined by the trainees under supervision.

Code of Ethics

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Code of Ethics for healthcare professionals is based on four key principles

- ✓ Beneficence
- ✓ Non-maleficence
- ✓ Respect for autonomy
- ✓ Justice

Beneficence is striving to do good and to do the best for every patient. Optometrists as healthcare professionals have a duty of care to every patient and the key objective is to do good so that every patient leaves the practice in a better state than when they entered, or at the very least, not in a worse condition.

Non-maleficence is to do no harm to patients and Optometrists must strive to ensure that balancing risks to benefits is considered while treating patients.

Optometrists need to **respect autonomy** and ensure that they involve patients and their family in decision making for care and services rendered to patients. Informed consent needs to be obtained prior to implementation of investigative and treatment protocols.

Justice includes fair professional practice with no distinction in services being rendered based on caste, socio-economic status or creed.

Patient confidentiality, protection of vulnerable populations like children and differently abled is part of medical ethics.

Collegiality and respect for fellow optometrists and other healthcare professionals are also integral ethical medical practices.

References:

1. Members handbook for the College of Optometrists, UK
2. Pierscionek B. Ethics in Optometric Practice-the Obligations that Define a Profession. Journal of Optometry. 2008;1(1):5.