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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Responsibilities to Patients</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Responsibility to Colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Responsibility to Community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Terminology**

"Patient" – the use of the word patient in the code is to be broadly interpreted as individuals or groups who have contact with the nurse in his/her professional capacity and does not necessarily denote or imply ill health.

"Nurse" – where used in the code, the word nurse shall have the meaning assigned to it in the Nurses Act 1950. The word “nurse” means a person registered in the Register of Nurses and includes a midwife and nursing includes midwifery.

**Introduction**

An Bord Altranais is the Statutory Body which provides for the registration, certification, control and training of nurses and for other matters relating to nurses and the practice of nursing. It sees its overall responsibility to be in the interest of the public.

The nursing profession demands a high standard of professional behaviour from its members.

The purpose of this code is to provide a framework to assist the nurse to make professional decisions, to carry out his/her responsibilities, and to promote high standards of professional conduct.

This code provides guidelines. Specific issues will be considered, when they arise, by An Bord. An Bord shall take appropriate action where nurses fail to meet the requirements of the code.
1. Responsibility to Patients

1.1 The aim of the nursing profession is to give the highest standard of care possible to patients. It is the responsibility of the nurse to be aware of and to take appropriate action in circumstances of incompetent, unethical or illegal practices.

1.2 Failure to report behaviour which is likely to jeopardise the health or treatment of patients, shall be seen as condoning bad practice.

1.3 Information regarding patient's history, treatment and state of health is privileged and confidential. It is accepted nursing practice that nursing care is communicated and recorded as part of the patient's care and treatment. Professional judgment and responsibility should be exercised in the sharing of such information with professional colleagues. The confidentiality of patients' records must be safeguarded.

1.4 In certain circumstances, the nurse may be required by a court of law to divulge information held. A nurse called to give evidence in court should seek in advance legal and/or professional advice as to the response to be made if required by the court to divulge confidential information.

1.5 The nurse must uphold the trust of those who allow him/her privileged access to their property, home or workplace.

1.6 It is appropriate to highlight the dangers to confidentiality of computers and electronic processing in the field of health services administration.

1.7 Every effort should be made to ensure that a patient understands the nature and purpose of their care and treatment.

1.8 Each patient has a right to determine what will happen to his/her person. The nurse has an obligation to uphold such rights. It is necessary for patients to have appropriate information for making an informed judgment. In certain circumstances there may be a doubt whether certain information should be given to a patient and special care should be taken in such cases.

1.9 Any form of sexual advance to a patient with whom there exists a professional relationship will be regarded as professional misconduct.

1.10 The rapid advance in technological and scientific knowledge has led to a changing role for the nurse. The nurse:

- shall be accountable in assuming additional responsibilities;
- will have professional responsibility to sustain and improve his/her knowledge and professional competence;
- will ensure that patients have appropriate care.
1.11 A nurse shall be entitled to make known at the earliest possible opportunity to an appropriate person or authority any conscientious objection which may be relevant to professional practice. An Bord shall be the final arbiter as to whether any such objection falls within the scope of this clause.

2. Responsibility to Nursing Colleagues

2.1 Nurses share the responsibility of care with colleagues. If workloads and pressures on colleagues place safe standards of care in jeopardy, the nurse must take appropriate action by making nursing administration aware of the situation.

2.2 Nurses have a continuing responsibility to junior colleagues. He/she is obliged to transmit acquired professional knowledge, skills and attitudes both by word and example. The nurse must not delegate to junior colleagues tasks and responsibilities beyond their skill and experience.

2.3 The registered nurse is responsible for the overall care provided by students. The nurse’s responsibility in transmitting knowledge, skills and attitudes and in maintaining standards of care extends to student nurses wherever their learning activity occurs.

3. Responsibility to the Community

3.1 The nurse is responsible to the community and the public for implementing and maintaining optimal standards of care.

3.2 Nurses who wish to practice must be registered with An Bord Altranais. If a nurse is aware that a nurse or other person is practicing without current registration, An Bord must be notified. Nursing titles (eg RGN et al) may only be used if the holder is listed in the register of An Bord Altranais for that division.

3.3 The nurse shall work in close co-operation with members of the health professions and others in promoting community and national efforts to meet the health needs of the public.

3.4 The nurse must at all times maintain the principle that every effort should be made to preserve human life, both born and unborn. When death is imminent, care should be taken to ensure that a patient dies with dignity and as little suffering as possible.

3.5 When making public statements, the nurse shall make it clear whether he/she is acting in a personal capacity or on behalf of the profession.
3.6 The nurse shall not:
- so use his/her professional qualifications to give or imply public endorsement of commercial products or services in his/her professional capacity;
- advertise to enhance his/her professional reputation.

3.7 The nurse should not accept monetary gifts or favours from patients/relatives as this could be interpreted as seeking to exert undue influence or to obtain preferential treatment.

3.8 The nurse must at all times take reasonable precautions to ensure that he/she is physically and mentally competent to carry out his/her duties. Abuse of alcohol or other drugs adversely affect that competence.

4. Research

4.1 In taking part in research, the principles of confidentiality and the provision of appropriate information to enable an informed judgment to be made by the patient, must be safeguarded. The nurse has an obligation to ascertain that the research is sanctioned by the appropriate body and to ensure that the rights of the patient are protected at all times. Where research is carried out there should be an ethical committee. The nurse should be aware of the committees' policies and procedures.