



# Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board

## *Interpretation Guide*

### **Maintaining Professional Boundaries**

*(Companion to the NLPB Code of Ethics)*

Approved June 2, 2023

#### **1) Introduction**

In the context of this document,

- “boundary” means the point at which a relationship changes from professional to personal;
- “personal relationship” means a relationship between a pharmacy professional and a patient that is established for the purpose of enjoyment of the individuals involved. Personal relationships can be online or in-person, and can be casual or serious, friendly, or romantic; and
- “professional relationship” means a relationship between a pharmacy professional and a patient that is established for the purpose of achieving positive health-related outcomes for the patient.

#### **2) Expectations**

2.1 Pharmacy professionals are expected to establish and build professional relationships with patients that are based on respect and acknowledge the patient’s autonomy and dignity. A pharmacist or pharmacy technician’s professional relationship with a patient is held to a high standard, as outlined in the Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board (“NLPB”) Code of Ethics. The pharmacy professional’s self-interest should never come before the therapeutic needs of the patient.

2.2 Pharmacy professionals are expected to be aware of the inherent power-imbalance that exists in their relationships with patients, particularly patients that are vulnerable. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have intimate knowledge of the patient’s health concerns, and the patient relies on them. Pharmacy professionals are expected to avoid personal relationships with patients regardless of a patient’s willingness to initiate, or consent to, a relationship that is anything other than professional in nature.

2.3 A pharmacy professional may consider providing care to a person with whom they are in a personal relationship if:

- the health care service provided to the person by the pharmacy professional is minor in nature or is provided in an emergency situation; and
- the relationship with the person would not impact the pharmacy professional’s decisions related to the health care service being provided.

If the above conditions cannot be met, the pharmacy professional must take reasonable steps to attempt to transfer the person’s care to another pharmacy professional.

2.4 Pharmacy professionals are expected to set, maintain, and communicate the boundaries of their relationship with patients. If a professional relationship begins to cross the boundary towards a personal relationship, it is the responsibility of the pharmacy professional to maintain the boundary.

2.5 When considering whether a relationship has crossed the boundary from a professional relationship to a personal relationship, registrants should consider the following statements from the NLPB Code of Ethics<sup>1</sup>:

- *1.1 Registrants place the health and well-being of their patients at the centre of their practice.*

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<sup>1</sup> See NLPB Code of Ethics. Available at: <https://nlpb.ca/pharmacy-practice/standards-guidelines-policies/>

- 1.6 Registrants advocate for, and protect, the well-being of each patient, especially those who are vulnerable or disenfranchised.
- 1.7 Registrants take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to patients.
- 2.1 Registrants respect the professional relationship with the patient, and act with honesty, integrity, and compassion in order to foster the patient's trust and confidence in the registrant.
- 2.5 Registrants recognize the power imbalance in the registrant-patient relationship and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients.
- 2.6 Registrants act in the best interests of their patients and do not exploit the registrant-patient relationship for any personal gain.
- 2.7 Registrants limit treatment of themselves, or immediate family members, to only minor conditions, emergency circumstances or situations when another appropriate health professional is not readily available in a reasonable timeframe.
- 4.1 Registrants understand, respect, and comply with all relevant legislation, standards, and policies pertaining to the privacy, confidentiality, collection, and storage of personal health information.
- 5.5 Registrants continue to provide care to their patients until the services are no longer wanted or required, until another provider has assumed responsibility for the patient, or until the registrant has provided reasonable notice of termination of the relationship.
- 6.1 Registrants obey the laws, regulations, standards, and policies of the profession, both in letter and in spirit.
- 6.2 Registrants embrace the ethical principles of the profession, and do not engage in activity that will undermine public trust in, or bring discredit to, the profession.
- 6.3 Registrants do not practice under conditions which compromise their freedom to exercise professional judgment, or which cause a deterioration of the quality of care to their patients.
- 6.6 Registrants do not enter into arrangements that undermine, or could reasonably be perceived to undermine, their own or another health professional's judgement.
- 8.4 Registrants refer their patients to other health care professionals or agencies, when appropriate.
- 10.3 Registrants recognize, and avoid whenever possible, conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of their work. If conflicts of interest do arise and cannot be avoided, they should be disclosed and addressed as soon as possible.

2.6 In accordance with section 58. of the *Pharmacy Act, 2012*<sup>2</sup> and the Code of Ethics, pharmacy professionals have a duty to report to NLPB if they have knowledge of professional misconduct, professional incompetence, incapacity, or unfitness to practice, conduct unbecoming, or any breach of the legislation, regulations, or Code of Ethics by another pharmacy professional.

**PLEASE NOTE:** While not all pharmacy owners are pharmacy professionals, there is still an inherent power imbalance within the relationship between a patient and a pharmacy owner, and, as such, pharmacy owners are also expected to abide by this guidance.

<sup>2</sup> *Pharmacy Act, 2012*: available at: <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/p12-2.htm>