

# Standards of Practice

# Professional Boundaries

## Standard

The physiotherapist acts with professional integrity and maintains appropriate **professional boundaries** with **clients**, colleagues, students and others.

## Expected outcome

Clients can expect to be treated with integrity and respect, and that the physiotherapist will maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the **therapeutic relationship** in all interactions.

Colleagues, students and others can expect to be treated with integrity and respect and that the physiotherapist will maintain professional boundaries in all interactions.

## Performance expectations

The physiotherapist:

- Demonstrates sensitivity, accountability, integrity, honesty, compassion, and respect in all professional interactions.
- Understands the impact of power, trust, respect, and physical closeness on relationships with clients, colleagues, students, and others.
- Treats clients, colleagues, students and others with respect avoiding all situations, comments and/or actions (e.g., sexual, racial) that would reasonably be perceived as unprofessional, in violation of human rights, or discriminatory.
- Establishes and maintains professional boundaries and does not make abusive, suggestive or harassing comments or engage in inappropriate physical contact or sexual advances with clients, colleagues, students, and others.
- Identifies, discusses, and attempts to resolve issues or seeks advice when the potential for compromising boundaries exists, whether by the physiotherapist or the client.
- Manages situations of real, potential, or perceived **conflicts of interest** where the relationship with clients, colleagues, students, and others could be compromised.
- Explains to clients beforehand any procedures that could be misinterpreted (e.g., removal of clothing, touching, physical closeness) and obtains ongoing **informed consent**.
- Ends any **therapeutic relationship** with clients where professional boundaries cannot be maintained or re-established, by appropriately discontinuing treatment or transferring care as required.
- Confirms that any exchanges using **electronic communication and social media** are appropriate for therapeutic relationships established with clients.

**Clients** are recipients of physiotherapy services, and may be individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, or populations. An individual client may also be referred to as a patient. In some circumstances, clients/patients may be represented by their substitute decision-makers.

**Conflicts of interest** refers to situations that arise when the physiotherapist has a relationship or interest that may be seen as improperly influencing their professional judgment or ability to act in the best interest of the client."

**Therapeutic relationship** refers to the relationship that exists between a physical therapist and a client during the course of physical therapy treatment. The relationship is based on trust, respect, and the expectation that the physical therapist will establish and maintain the relationship according to applicable legislation and regulatory requirements and will not harm or exploit the client in any way.

**Electronic communication, social media** refers to "software, applications (including those running on mobile devices), email and websites, which enable users to interact, create and exchange information online." While not strictly speaking electronic communication or social media, the use of videography or the taking and communication of photographs are included in this definition relating to technology.

**Informed consent** refers to "receiving client or their legally authorized representative's permission to proceed with an agreed course of physiotherapy service. Consent may be revoked at any time...Consent can be written or oral, and may be expressed or implied. Having a written consent form does not mean there is informed consent. Informed consent involves ongoing communication between the parties involved."

**Professional boundaries** set the limitations around relationships between clients and health-care providers to ensure the delivery of safe, ethical, client-centered care. Professional boundaries are characterized by respectful, trusting, and ethical interactions with patients that are free of abuse, sexual and/or romantic encounters.

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## Related Standards

- Client Assessment, Diagnosis, Interventions
- Client-Centered Care
- Conflict of Interest
- Consent