

EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS

July 2009

1.1 This Code of Conduct is a guide for member organisations of ECOO, to be used as a point of reference in the development of their own codes of conduct. The code lays down ethical principles relating to the conduct of professionals in the profession of optometry and optics, and sets out obligations and behavioural duties for those professionals.

1.2 The Code does not assume that optometry and optics are regulated but requires that in countries where the optical profession is regulated, professionals will comply with the requirements of the regulatory body.

1.3 The Code complies with European Community law and in particular internal market and competition law. It also complies with basic freedoms to establish and provide services as guaranteed by Articles 43 and 49 of the EC Treaty and by the related statutory instruments.

1.4 The Code, and its elaboration, will appear on the public area of the ECOO website.

1.5 The Code will be reviewed regularly, and kept up to date to reflect any changes in legislation which affect ECOO members.

The Code

1 The Care of the Patient/Client

The care of your patient should be your first and continuing priority.

2 The honesty and trustworthiness of the professional

Be honest and trustworthy at all times in both your professional practice and your personal life

3 The professional manner of the optometrist and optician

Behave in a professional manner towards other healthcare professionals

4 The registration of the professional with the competent authority

Register with and maintain registration with the competent authority in your country, if applicable.

Elaboration

1 The care of your patient/client should be your first and continuing priority.

Elaboration

The relationship with the patient/client, as the recipient of your services, must be conducted within an ethical framework. You must provide your patient/client with objective information concerning the service you provide. Your patients/clients have the right to expect assessment of their circumstances to be carried out and decisions to be made impartially and objectively, without pressure from external sources and without conflicts of interest.

The first priority in the provision of professional services must be the best interests of the patient/client, subject to any over-riding legal requirements. Patient/client care should be tailored towards the need of individual patients/clients.

In order to provide the highest level of care to your patients/clients, you should keep your knowledge and skills up to date.

You must work at all times within the limits of your own competence, and refer to other professionals when you are not competent to address your patient's/client's needs.

2 Be honest and trustworthy

Elaboration

You must not engage in any activity or behaviour that would be likely to bring the profession into disrepute. In particular you should not engage in any activity or behaviour that would undermine public confidence in the profession.

Professionals are required to observe strict professional secrecy. Confidentiality is the cornerstone for the building of trust between professionals and their patients/clients. You must respect and safeguard the confidentiality of the information acquired in the course of providing professional services and ensure that information about a patient/client is not disclosed to others except in specified circumstances and, where possible, with the informed consent of the individual.

Those who use professional services have the right to expect to be treated with courtesy and respect. They are also entitled to receive sound professional advice in terms they will understand, as well as information before and during the provisions of services, both on the procedure it is intended to pursue to achieve the desired objective, and on the fees involved.

You must not display sexualised behaviour towards patients/clients or their carers. The relationship between the professional and the patient/client depends on confidence and trust. If you display sexualised behaviour towards a patient/client or carer you breach that trust and, additionally, may be committing a criminal act.

3 Behave in a professional manner towards other healthcare professionals

Elaboration

You must work with colleagues in the ways that best serve patients'/clients' interests.

You must act quickly to protect patients from risk where there is good reason to believe that a colleague may not be fit to practise.

Patients/clients have freedom of choice of service provider, and you must not act in any way that compromises this.

4 Register with and maintain registration with the competent authority in your country, if applicable.

Elaboration

Regulation is defined as where the State has either delegated regulatory power to organisations, calling on them to lay down the rules necessary for the pursuit of the profession and to carry out supervision, or the State may itself directly lay down such rules.

Where there is regulation, often professional organisations are at the centre of the pursuit of professional activities. The majority of sectors with a code of conduct come under the sector of regulated professions. This is mainly because membership of a professional organisation is often compulsory by law for regulated professions.

Where there is no regulation, there may be less effective local representation of professionals, but it is important that the local representative body is capable of devising self-regulation, observed by its members, with the objective of enhancing the level of quality of the service provider by increasing the transparency of the rules laid down in the Code and by improving the patient's awareness of them. It is therefore recommended that for organisations operating in non-regulated countries, local rules should be drawn up which cover the aspects of practice which might be regulated. These include vocational and/or professional training requirements, and sanctions for professionals who act in a way that might be unsafe for the patient.