

Foreword

So much is expected of doctors. They must be highly skilled practitioners, especially if they perform procedures such as surgery. They must be up-to-date with the science of innovations that purport to offer more effective diagnosis and treatment. They must be excellent communicators—with patients and their carers, other doctors, and all the members of the health-care team, whether in the hospital ward, the emergency department, meetings and encounters with health service managers.

Informing these expected behaviours, doctors must also behave in ways that manifest personal and professional integrity, put the patient first, and avoid any suggestion of exploitation of the powerful position they occupy. At the gentle end of the scale of expectation are values manifest in honest and open communication with the patient. At the tough, pointy end of the scale are laws that must be obeyed governing the clear limits of the professional role, such as apply to sexual behaviour, confidentiality and honest business dealings. These ethics and laws, which vary from society to society in detail, must be known by the practitioner and applied, sometimes in complicated circumstances that were unlikely to be anticipated when the ethical principle was first developed or the law was enacted.

Appropriately, change is the dominant theme in the first chapter, and not only the changes in emerging knowledge and practice, but also changes relating to the understanding of doctors' work–life balance and their own health and wellbeing, as well as changing community attitudes towards the medical profession and health care.

For a medical student considering what lies ahead in clinical practice, a new medical graduate or an experienced practitioner coming to Australia, these responsibilities and obligations quickly crowd in. The authors of this book, with wide and deep experience in Australian medical practice and knowledge of ethical norms and laws that pertain to it, have prepared a volume that should provide information that will be helpful and reassuring.

Each section covers an important topic. Each topic is dealt with concisely and clearly. An excellent index makes the text highly accessible. While parts of the book might be read in prospect, its greatest use may be as a ready reference for when matters arise in the fields of professionalism, law and ethics that the practitioner encounters.

The book emphasises the critical importance of effective communication, which for the contemporary doctor must include, among other things, an appreciation of psychosocial and transcultural factors in patients seeking medical help, an ability to cope with angry, distressed or difficult patients, and an ability to talk about such matters as sexuality, mental illness and dying with appropriate sensitivity. Recognising that modern medical practice is a team activity, there is also very useful discussion of doctors' relationships with other health professionals and allied service providers, such as nurses, pharmacists, clinical psychologists, physiotherapists and many others.

In keeping with the admirably comprehensive nature of the book, it also covers such matters of interest for new or intending doctors as professional registration requirements; regulation and complaints handling; resource allocation; research and research ethics; and the contours of the Australian health-care system.

The Australian Medical Council (AMC) has responsibility for assuring that standards in medical education and practice are achieved and maintained, including the recognition of doctors whose training has been outside Australia and who now seek to practise here. It is gratifying that the AMC has agreed to badge *Good medical practice: professionalism, ethics and law* as a source of information for both university medical students and also for international medical graduates undertaking the AMC examination. The AMC says of the publication that it will ‘provide a valuable addition to the blueprint of the AMC examination content in the context of Australian law, ethics and professionalism’.

With this endorsement of its value and utility, we most heartily agree and we commend this book to aspiring Australian medical practitioners without reservation. The authors have done a superb job of providing great breadth and covering an enormous amount of complicated territory in a clear, concise and interesting manner, combining high principle with the exigencies of day-to-day clinical practice. The final product represents an enormous amount of hard work and creative thought by the authors, and the medical profession and the general community are in their debt.

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