



# ASA Sonographer Code of Conduct

Date of issue: Effective from March 2022.

Last reviewed: May 2022.

# Contents

1. Purpose .....	4
2. Introduction .....	4
2.1 Role of the code of conduct .....	4
2.2 Professional values and qualities .....	5
2.3 Australia and New Zealand healthcare .....	5
2.4 Substitute decision-makers .....	5
2.5 Treatment in emergencies .....	6
3. Providing care .....	6
3.1 Patient-centred care .....	6
3.2 Professional competence and conduct .....	6
3.3 Decisions about access to care .....	7
4. Working with patients .....	8
4.1 Partnership .....	8
4.2 Effective communication .....	8
4.3 Confidentiality and privacy .....	9
4.4 Informed consent .....	10
4.5 Young people .....	11
4.6 Culturally safe and sensitive practice .....	12
4.7 Patients who may have additional needs .....	13
4.8 Adverse events and open disclosure .....	13
4.9 Complaints and investigations .....	13
4.10 Ending a professional relationship .....	14
4.11 Personal relationships .....	14
5. Working with other sonographers and other healthcare professionals .....	15
5.1 Respect for colleagues and other sonographers .....	15
5.2 Working within a team .....	15
5.3 Bullying and harassment .....	16
6. Working within the healthcare system .....	16
6.1 Effective use of healthcare resources .....	16
6.2 Health advocacy .....	17
7. Minimising risk .....	17
7.1 Risk management .....	17
7.2 Sonographer performance .....	18
8. Maintaining professional performance .....	18
8.1 Maintaining and developing knowledge, skills and professional behaviour .....	18
8.2 Continuing professional development (CPD) .....	19
9. Professional behaviour .....	19
9.1 Professional boundaries .....	19
9.2 Reporting obligations .....	20
9.3 Health records .....	20
9.4 Insurance .....	21

9.5 Advertising .....	21
9.6 Legal, insurance and other examinations/procedures .....	21
9.7 Reports and giving evidence .....	21
9.8 Conflicts of interest .....	22
9.9 Financial and commercial dealings .....	22
9.10 Social media .....	23
10. Ensuring sonographer health .....	23
10.1 Sonographer health .....	23
10.2 Other sonographers' health .....	24
11. Teaching and supervising .....	24
11.1 Teaching and supervising early career and trainee sonographers .....	24
11.2 Assessing colleagues .....	25
12. Undertaking research .....	26
12.1 Involvement in human research .....	26
12.2 Research ethics .....	26

## 1. Purpose

---

The Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA), Code of Conduct for Sonographers (Code) sets out the required standards of professional conduct and ethics, as well as other principles for safe and effective practice by sonographers who are members of the ASA. The code was developed after consultation with the sonography profession. Its intention is to describe the professional conduct of sonographers and to let the community know the standard of practice to expect from sonographers.

The code contains important principles that set out expectations of members and is intended to complement information and guidance issued by other organisations, such as employers and statutory authorities. At all times, sonographers must comply with any applicable laws and codes governing the practice of sonography. Sonographers are expected to acknowledge and abide by the code. However, its application will vary according to individual circumstances without compromising the principles.

This code applies to practising sonographers and sonography students, as well as members of the public and patients receiving sonography services in Australia and New Zealand.

## 2. Introduction

---

### 2.1 Role of the code of conduct

Sonographers have a professional responsibility to be familiar with this code of conduct and to apply the guidance it contains. This code will be used to:

- a. support individual sonographers in the challenging task of providing healthcare and fulfilling their professional roles, and to provide a framework to guide professional judgement
- b. assist the ASA in advising the profession on the highest standards required to provide the best possible outcomes in ultrasound for patients
- c. assist with the determination of membership consequences for errors or reported failure to meet the standard of practice described in this code
- d. provide an additional resource for a range of uses that contribute to enhancing the culture of sonographer professionalism, for example: in sonographer education; orientation, induction and supervision of students; and for use by administrators and policy makers in hospitals, health services and other institutions.

Although this code may be used as a guide to the public, patients and other health service users about the standard of practice and behaviour expected from sonographers, it is not a charter of rights.

This code does not displace the obligations imposed on sonographers and other health providers under relevant laws. Organisations and individuals should seek their own independent legal advice if they have concerns regarding their compliance with relevant legislation.

## 2.2 Professional values and qualities

While individual sonographers have their own personal beliefs and values, there are certain professional values upon which all sonographers are expected to base their practice.

Sonographers have a duty to make the care of patients their first concern and to practise safely and effectively. They must be ethical and trustworthy. Patients should be able to trust sonographers, and believe that in addition to being competent, sonographers will not take advantage of them and will display qualities such as integrity, honesty, dependability, and compassion. Patients should also be able to rely on sonographers to protect their confidentiality.

Sonographers have a responsibility to recognise and work within the limits of their workplace protocols, policies and procedures and their competence and scope of practice, recognising that this will vary according to their role.

## 2.3 Australia and New Zealand healthcare

Australia and New Zealand are culturally diverse communities. Australians and New Zealanders inhabit lands that for many ages were held and cared for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori peoples. The histories and cultures of these peoples have uniquely shaped their nations. Australian and New Zealand societies are further enriched by the contribution of people from many nations who have made these countries their home.

Sonographers are required to be competent when engaging with patients whose cultures may differ from their own and with colleagues and other health professionals from diverse backgrounds. The ASA acknowledges that in New Zealand, the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi is a founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, which informs legislation, policy, and practice, and aims to reduce the health inequalities between Māori and non-Māori. A sonographer in New Zealand must understand the relevance and be able to apply the Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi principles, while promoting equitable opportunity for positive health outcomes within the context of Māori health (models), including whānau (family health), tinana (physical health), hinengaro (mental health) and wairua (spiritual health).

## 2.4 Substitute decision-makers

In this code, reference to the term 'patient' also includes substitute decision-makers for patients who do not have the capacity to make their own decisions. These can be parents, guardians, a person nominated by the patient as their support person/people, a power of attorney or other legally appointed decision-maker.

## 2.5 Treatment in emergencies

Treating patients in emergencies requires practitioners to consider a range of issues in addition to providing best care. Sonographers should help in an emergency being mindful of their own safety, skills, the availability of other options, and the impact on any other patients under their care and continue to help until services are no longer needed.

## 3. Providing care

---

### 3.1 Patient-centred care

Sonographers should practise patient-centred care during all their professional interactions with patients and their support person/people. Patient-centred care involves:

- a. encouraging patients to take interest in, and responsibility for, the management of their own health
- b. protecting the autonomy, dignity, and privacy of patients
- c. assessing the patient, noting their clinical history (including relevant psychological, social and cultural considerations), patient views, and where physical examination is indicated, relevant findings from this examination
- d. formulating and implementing a suitable and appropriate examination/procedure, including liaising with, and referring to, other appropriate health practitioners when indicated
- e. facilitating continuity of care when indicated
- f. recognising and respecting the patient's right to make their own decisions.

### 3.2 Professional competence and conduct

Professional competence and conduct involve:

- a. demonstrating a high level of professional competence and conduct that is reflected in practice and which supports the reputation of the sonography profession
- b. recognising and working within the limits of competence and scope of practice, recognising that both may change over time. A sonographer must not provide services that are outside their experience or training, nor provide services that they are not qualified to provide, or that are not clinically justifiable
- c. committing to ongoing learning and the maintenance and development of clinical/professional skills and competency in their area of practice to provide safe and effective care
- d. ensuring that they have undertaken the requisite training and/or obtained the requisite qualifications to achieve the required level of competence when moving into a new area of practice
- e. ensuring independence and professional judgement within their scope of practice when providing support and advice to patients and other health professionals. This includes being able to justify and take responsibility for their professional decisions and actions

- f. practising with due care and respect for an individual patient's culture, needs, values, worldviews, and beliefs
- g. maintaining clear and adequate records, ensuring they are stored securely
- h. considering the balance of benefit and risk of harm in performing ultrasound examinations/procedures
- i. engaging in evidence-informed practice
- j. communicating effectively with patients and their support person/people with respect and honesty
- k. providing examinations/procedures based on the most credible, accurate and highest quality available information and not influenced by financial or other personal gain or incentives
- l. avoiding conflicts of interest by not offering, requesting, or accepting incentives, gifts, or hospitality that may be perceived as, and/or result in, a personal benefit
- m. taking steps, to the extent practicable, to alleviate the distress of patients and mitigate the risk of harm to patients
- n. supporting the right of the patient to seek a second opinion
- o. recognising the expertise and experience of all health professionals involved in the care of the patient, and working collaboratively and in cooperation with these individuals in the interests of their patients
- p. using available resources responsibly and effectively
- q. ensuring that personal views do not adversely impact the care of a patient.

### 3.3 Decisions about access to care

Sonographers may be involved in making decisions about a patient's access to healthcare. Access to care involves:

- a. collaborating in decision-making with patients and colleagues that is free from bias and discrimination
- b. treating patients in a culturally safe and respectful manner, and not prejudicing the care of a patient because they believe that the behaviour of the patient has contributed to their condition
- c. being non-discriminating on grounds of an attribute such as ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, political or other opinion, disability, age, or other grounds specified in antidiscrimination legislation in the relevant jurisdiction
- d. ensuring patients are clearly informed of the purpose and nature of the relevant examination, thus supporting them to make an informed choice
- e. protecting vulnerable or disadvantaged patients from exploitation and harm
- f. investigating and examining patients based on clinical referral and the effectiveness of the proposed examination/procedure, and not providing unnecessary services
- g. being aware of sonographer rights to not provide or participate directly in an examination/procedure to which they object conscientiously. This may involve informing patients and, if relevant, colleagues of the objection and avoiding using the objection to impede access to healthcare that is legal. In turn, this may

involve appropriate referral of the patient

- h. being aware of the rights of the patient to refuse an examination/procedure or to withdraw consent at any time
- i. taking action to protect themselves and staff if a patient poses a risk to their health and/or safety.  
Wherever possible, the patient should not be denied care if reasonable steps can be taken to keep sonographers and other staff safe.

## 4. Working with patients

---

### 4.1 Partnership

Working with patients is a partnership between the sonographer and the patient and their support person/people based on openness, trust, mutual respect, and good communication, even in situations of personal incompatibility. The sonographer-patient partnership involves:

- a. respecting patient rights and providing care that respects patient dignity and needs
- b. acting in the best interests of each patient by supporting and promoting the individual rights of the patient, ensuring they cause no harm
- c. maintaining the same high standards of care for all patients
- d. demonstrating a high standard of personal conduct, including respecting appropriate professional boundaries throughout all interactions with patients, including through social media
- e. treating each patient as an individual, being courteous, respectful, compassionate, and honest
- f. upholding the rights, values, and autonomy of every patient, including their role in the diagnostic process, and in maintaining health and wellbeing
- g. protecting the privacy and right to confidentiality of patients, unless release of information is required or permitted by law
- h. encouraging and supporting patients to be well informed about their health, as far as possible, within the scope of practice and applicable workplace policies
- i. respecting the rights of the patient and performing the relevant examination/procedure without prejudice
- j. recognising that there is a power imbalance in the sonographer-patient relationship and never engaging in physical, emotional, sexual, or financial exploitation of the patient.

### 4.2 Effective communication

Effective communication, in all forms, is an important part of the sonographer-patient relationship. This involves:

- a. listening actively, using appropriate language and detail, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues, and confirming that the other person has understood, or if they have any questions



- b. communicating clearly, sensitively, and effectively with the patient and their support person/people, always ensuring respect, confidentiality, privacy, and dignity is afforded to the patient
- c. applying a range of communication strategies, both verbal and nonverbal, to establish rapport, engender trust and confidence, and facilitate understanding of the patient's issues and perspectives
- d. responding to the patient's and their support person's/people's concerns, queries, or issues in a timely and accurate manner
- e. encouraging patients to provide information about their health or other information relevant to their examination/procedure
- f. understanding the clinical setting to ensure that communication with the patient about their condition and treatment pathways is in the interest of the patient and within the competencies of the sonographer
- g. ensuring adequate opportunity for the patient to question or refuse an examination/procedure
- h. ensuring that communication is provided in a manner appropriate to the patient's ability to understand, taking account of factors such as age, capacity, learning ability and physical ability, and that attempts are made to confirm that a patient understands what a sonographer has said
- i. ensuring that patients are informed of the risks associated with any part of a proposed examination/procedure
- j. responding to questions from patients, recognising the limits of a sonographer's ability to advise patients about their healthcare, including the sonographer's clinical experience, formal training and assessed competence to provide such information, any local policies relating to the provision of such information, and the clinical context of the enquiry
- k. being aware of the characteristics and consequences of verbal and nonverbal communication and how the interpretation of these can vary depending on factors such as age, culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and spiritual or religious beliefs
- l. being sensitive to, and identifying, likely communication barriers specific to individual patients and their support person/people associated with specific language, cultural and communication needs
- m. applying knowledge of likely communication barriers and making appropriate adjustments to communication styles to suit the needs of the patient, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- n. using qualified language interpreters where possible to help meet the communication needs of patients, including those who require assistance because of their English skills or because they are speech or hearing impaired.

### 4.3 Confidentiality and privacy

Sonographers have ethical and legal obligations to protect the privacy of people requiring and receiving care. Confidentiality and privacy involve:

- a. performing the examination/procedure and conveying knowledge and procedural information in ways that create trust and confidence, always respecting patient confidentiality, privacy, and dignity
- b. treating all information about patients as confidential and seeking consent from patients using standardised consent processes, including formal documentation if required, for the release and exchange of health and medical information
- c. being aware of, and always complying with, the requirements of the privacy and/or health records legislation that operate in relevant jurisdictions, and applying these requirements to information held in all formats, including ultrasound images and electronic information during and beyond employment or engagement
- d. sharing information appropriately about patients for their healthcare to the extent permitted under privacy legislation and professional guidelines about confidentiality
- e. being aware of complex issues relating to genetic and other complex information and seeking appropriate advice about disclosure of such information
- f. providing appropriate surroundings to enable private and confidential consultations and discussions to take place
- g. ensuring that all staff are aware of the need to respect the confidentiality and privacy of patients, and not to discuss patients in a non-professional context
- h. seeking consent from patients to remove only the clothes required to allow appropriate examination/procedure
- i. providing private and secure facilities for dressing and undressing
- j. allowing only personnel essential for the examination procedure to be in the room with the patient (except in circumstances where the patient has provided their consent for, and the sonographer has agreed to, another person(s) attending the procedure)
- k. maintaining patient confidentiality when non-healthcare personnel are nearby
- l. reporting immediately any breaches in privacy and confidentiality to an appropriate authority, employer, regulator or professional organisation.

#### 4.4 Informed consent

Informed consent for any examination needs to be gained prior to performing the examination/procedure.

Seeking and obtaining informed consent involves:

- a. supporting the patient to provide voluntary consent to an examination/procedure based on appropriate knowledge and understanding of the benefits and risks involved
- b. allowing consent provided only by a patient or nominated decision-maker who has capacity to provide it. Consent must be specific to the procedure, informed, given voluntarily, in a language the patient understands, respectful of the patient's gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs, and not obtained

through misrepresentation or fraud

- c. providing appropriate information about the examination/procedure including any risks involved to patients in a way they can understand before asking for their consent
- d. obtaining informed consent before performing any examination/procedure, assisting with treatment (except in an emergency) or involving patients in teaching or research, including providing information on risks
- e. obtaining the consent via people with legal authority to act on behalf of the patient and attempt to obtain the consent of the patient as far as practically possible, via an interpreter, if necessary, when working with a patient whose capacity to give consent is or may be impaired or limited
- f. advising patients that they can withdraw consent at any time without consequence and without having to give a reason. If there are any indications consent has been withdrawn, the sonographer must not continue with the examination/procedure
- g. documenting consent appropriately and considering the need for collecting and securely storing written consent for procedures that may result in serious injury or death
- h. advising the patient that there may be additional costs that they may wish to clarify before proceeding with the proposed examination/procedure
- i. obtaining specific consent for trainee sonographer involvement.

## 4.5 Young people

Caring for young people brings additional responsibilities for sonographers, such as:

- a. being sensitive to, and accommodating the needs of, young people in examinations and treatments
- b. placing the interests and wellbeing of the young person first
- c. treating the young person with respect and listening to their views
- d. encouraging questions and answering those questions to the best of the sonographer's ability
- e. providing information in a way that promotes the young person's understanding
- f. considering the young person's capacity for decision-making and consent. In general, where a sonographer judges that a young person is of a sufficient age and mental and emotional capacity to give consent to a service, that person should be able to request and provide informed consent to receive services without the consent of a parent, guardian, or another legal representative. If there is any doubt, advice can be sought from an appropriate guardian or child welfare authority
- g. recognising the role of parents and guardians and encouraging the young person to involve their parents and/or guardians in decisions about the relevant examination/procedure
- h. remaining alert to young people who may be at risk and notifying appropriate child protection authorities as required. This may include (but is not limited to) where a parent and/or guardian is refusing examination/procedure for their child and this decision may not be in the best interests of the child, or where there is a potential for child abuse.

## 4.6 Culturally safe and sensitive practice

Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa have culturally diverse populations. Cultural factors that may affect the sonographer/patient partnership include cultural and linguistic diversity, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status (including occupation), age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, geographic locations and identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Māori peoples. Sonographers are reflective of their own culture and beliefs and respectful of the beliefs and cultures of the patient, recognising that these cultural differences may impact the sonographer/patient relationship. Sonographers are aware that differences such as gender, sexuality, age, and belief systems may influence care needs, and avoid discrimination based on these differences. Sonographers should:

- a. have knowledge of, respect for, and sensitivity towards, the cultural needs of the community, including those of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Māori peoples, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- b. acknowledge the social, economic, cultural, and behavioural factors influencing health, both at individual and population levels
- c. recognise and evaluate the sociocultural factors that may influence patient attitudes and responses to sonography services
- d. understand that a sonographer's own culture and beliefs influence their interactions with patients
- e. adapt their practice to improve engagement and healthcare outcomes for patients by ensuring it is non-discriminatory, empathetic and respects sociocultural differences
- f. make appropriate adjustments to communication style to suit the needs of the patient, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori peoples, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- g. provide health services in a manner that is culturally sensitive to the individual patient's culture, needs, values, worldviews, and beliefs, including the needs, values, and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori peoples, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- h. respect, where possible, the individual cultural needs and preferences of patients who may prefer a health professional of specific gender due to their ethnic, religious, or cultural background, previous experiences, or in view of their age
- i. ensure that the importance of culture, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs, are incorporated into all aspects of professional practice, not just the clinical aspects
- j. include application of any local treaties with respect to cultural practice, such as the Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi, with an understanding of its principles within the context of New Zealand/Aotearoa, and its practical application within the profession. This includes upholding tikanga best practice guidelines when working with Māori patients and their whānau.

## 4.7 Patients who may have additional needs

Some patients (including those with impaired decision-making capacity) may have additional needs. Effective management of patients with additional needs involves:

- a. being sensitive to their needs and adapting practice to ensure that these needs are respected
- b. being aware that these patients may be at greater risk from exploitation and harm
- c. paying particular attention to communication with vulnerable groups
- d. being aware that increased advocacy may be necessary to ensure equitable access to healthcare
- e. recognising that there may be a range of people involved in their care, such as a support person/people or a guardian and involving them when appropriate.

## 4.8 Adverse events and open disclosure

Adverse events are a potential consequence of any procedure and sonographers need to be prepared to deal with them. This involves:

- a. considering the potential adverse events that may occur prior to undertaking the procedure
- b. minimising the risk of adverse events and mitigating the consequences of any event that might occur
- c. taking responsibility, if an adverse event occurs, to be open and honest in communication with the patient to review what has occurred and to report appropriately
- d. recognising what has happened and, where possible, acting promptly to rectify the problem
- e. ensuring that appropriate first aid or emergency assistance is engaged in the event of any serious adverse event and seeking any necessary help and advice as needed
- f. explaining to the patient as promptly and fully as possible what has happened and the anticipated short-term and long-term consequences
- g. acknowledging any patient distress and providing appropriate support
- h. complying with relevant policies, procedures, and reporting requirements, subject to advice from a professional indemnity insurer
- i. reviewing adverse events and implementing changes that are indicated from such a review to reduce the risk of recurrence
- j. reporting adverse events to the relevant authority as required
- k. ensuring patients have access to information about the processes for making a complaint
- l. recognising and reporting on near misses and their consequences, in addition to adverse events, and relevant contributing factors.

## 4.9 Complaints and investigations

Patients have a right to complain about their care, and sonographers have responsibilities and rights relating to any legitimate investigation of their practice, or that of a colleague. Sonographers must engage with

complaints and investigation processes, including:

- a. acknowledging, investigating, and respectfully treating the patient's complaint
- b. acknowledging the person's right to complain and working to resolve the issue where possible
- c. providing a prompt, open and constructive response, including an explanation and, if appropriate, an apology
- d. ensuring the complaint does not adversely affect the person's care
- e. complying with relevant complaints legislation, workplace policies and procedures
- f. being aware of the requirements of their professional indemnity insurer if asked to make any statements regarding patient care, complaints, and claims
- g. cooperating with any legitimate inquiry into the treatment of a patient and with any complaints procedure that relates to their own work
- h. complying with any interim prohibition orders which may be issued during the investigation
- i. disclosing to anyone entitled to ask for it, information relevant to an investigation into the conduct or performance of themselves or a colleague
- j. assisting the coroner when an inquest or inquiry is held into the death of a patient by responding to their inquiries and by offering all relevant information.

#### 4.10 Ending a professional relationship

In some circumstances, the relationship between a sonographer and a patient may become ineffective or compromised and may need to end. Ending a professional relationship involves:

- a. ensuring the patient is adequately informed of the decision
- b. assisting in arranging continuing patient care, including passing on relevant clinical information.

#### 4.11 Personal relationships

Providing health services to someone in a close relationship with the sonographer, for example: close friends, work colleagues and family members, can be inappropriate because of the lack of objectivity, possible discontinuity of care, and risks to the sonographer or patient. Providing health services to someone with whom a sonographer has a close relationship involves:

- a. ensuring that adequate records are kept
- b. maintaining confidentiality
- c. performing all elements of the examination/procedure
- d. obtaining informed consent
- e. maintaining, at all times, an option to discontinue care.

## 5. Working with other sonographers and other healthcare professionals

---

### 5.1 Respect for colleagues and other sonographers

Positive relationships with colleagues and other sonographers enhance the quality of the sonographer-patient relationship and, therefore, patient care. Working with other sonographers and other healthcare professionals involves:

- a. being courteous, respectful, and compassionate in dealings with other healthcare professionals
- b. communicating clearly, effectively, respectfully, and promptly with colleagues and other practitioners caring for the patient
- c. acknowledging and respecting the skills and contributions of all healthcare professionals involved in the care of the patient
- d. respecting the privacy and confidentiality of colleagues.

### 5.2 Working within a team

Many sonographers work closely with a wide range of healthcare professionals. Effective collaboration is a fundamental aspect of professionalism. Working in a team involves:

- a. understanding, acknowledging, and respecting the roles and responsibilities of healthcare team members and other service providers, and working effectively and collaboratively with them
- b. advocating for a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, including that of team leader or coordinators
- c. engaging in effective, respectful, timely, and accurate communication and cooperation with colleagues, other health professionals and agencies, to achieve optimal outcomes for the patient
- d. exercising independence and professional judgement and working within their scope of practice when providing support and advice to other health professionals
- e. making recommendations to other members of the healthcare team about the suitability and application of the proposed sonography examination/treatment where appropriate
- f. consulting and taking advice from colleagues where appropriate
- g. informing patients about the roles of team members
- h. acting as a positive role model for team members
- i. bringing unsafe or unethical behaviour by another health professional to the attention of the appropriate authority whenever legally required.

## 5.3 Bullying and harassment

There is no place for discrimination, racism, bullying, and harassment, including sexual harassment, in healthcare in Australia and New Zealand. Respect is a cornerstone of professional relationships and of patient safety. It is a feature of constructive relationships between practitioners, their peers, colleagues on healthcare teams, and with patients. Discrimination, bullying and harassment adversely affect individual health practitioners, increase risk to patients, and compromise effective teamwork by healthcare teams. Bullying and harassment requirements of sonographers involve:

- a. recognising that bullying and harassment can take many forms, including behaviours such as physical and verbal abuse, racism, discrimination, violence, aggression, humiliation, pressure in decision-making, exclusion, and intimidation directed towards colleagues and other people
- b. understanding that social media is sometimes used as a mechanism to bully or harass. Sonographers should not engage in, ignore, or excuse such behaviour
- c. acting to eliminate bullying and harassment, in all its forms, in the workplace
- d. taking appropriate action if in a leadership/management role
- e. escalating concerns if an appropriate response does not occur
- f. supporting colleagues who report bullying and harassment.

Sonographers must never engage in, ignore or excuse bullying and harassment, and if the sonographer believes unlawful discrimination may have occurred, policies and practices should be revised, and where appropriate, legal advice sought.

## 6. Working within the healthcare system

---

### 6.1 Effective use of healthcare resources

Sonographers have a responsibility to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the healthcare system.

Appropriate use of healthcare resources involves:

- a. optimising patient safety, comfort, and diagnostic quality with the efficient use of resources while achieving the objective of the examination/procedure
- b. ensuring that the services provided are appropriate for the assessed needs of the patient and are not excessive or unnecessary and are reasonably required
- c. supporting the transparent and equitable allocation of healthcare resources
- d. understanding that the use of resources can affect the access other patients may have to such healthcare resources.



## 6.2 Health advocacy

There are significant disparities in the health status of different groups in the Australian and New Zealand communities. These disparities can result from social, cultural, geographic, health-related, and other factors.

Health advocacy involves:

- a. using expertise and influence to protect and advance the health and wellbeing of individual patients, communities, and populations
- b. promoting the health of the community through disease prevention and control, education, and where relevant, public health screening initiatives
- c. understanding the national health system, including service provision and resource management arrangements, the structure and role of public and private providers, and reporting requirements.

## 7. Minimising risk

---

### 7.1 Risk management

Minimising risk to patients is an important component of practice and involves:

- a. understanding and applying the key principles of risk minimisation and management in practice
- b. participating actively in the process of risk identification, assessment, and control
- c. being aware of, and applying, the current safety standards and regulations, and undertaking a risk/benefit assessment for each examination/procedure prior to commencing the service
- d. explaining to a patient any potential risks with the examination/procedure they are planning to provide, and obtaining the consent of the patient, guardian, or other relevant person
- e. being aware of the principles of open disclosure and a non-punitive approach to incident management
- f. understanding and participating in relevant systems of quality assurance and improvement to practice
- g. participating in systems for surveillance and monitoring of adverse events and 'near misses', including reporting such events
- h. ensuring that systems are in place for raising concerns about risks to patients and co-workers if a sonographer has management responsibilities
- i. working to reduce errors and improve the safety of patients, and support colleagues who raise concerns about the safety of patients
- j. taking all reasonable steps to address the issue if there is reason to think that the safety of anybody may be compromised
- k. being familiar with the general risk profiles of pharmaceuticals, environmental agents and imaging products that are used in sonography, within scope of practice
- l. participating in education and training offered by employers on various subjects, including but not limited to musculoskeletal injury reduction, health and safety, and infection control.

## 7.2 Sonographer performance

The welfare of patients may be put at risk if a sonographer is performing poorly. Managing sonographer performance involves:

- a. recognising and taking steps to minimise risks to the patient, including complying with relevant occupational health and safety legislation in the relevant jurisdiction
- b. stopping an examination/procedure if the sonographer knows or suspects that they have a physical or mental impairment, disability, condition, or disorder (including an addiction to alcohol or a drug, whether prescribed or not), that could adversely affect judgement or performance
- c. seeking advice from a suitably qualified health practitioner to determine whether, and how, practice should be modified if they have a mental health or physical impairment that could place patients at risk
- d. taking immediate steps to protect patients from being placed at risk of harm if they form the reasonable belief that another sonographer or healthcare worker has placed, or is placing, patients at risk of harm. This involves referring the matter to the relevant state or territory health complaints body
- e. taking appropriate steps to assist a colleague to receive help if there are concerns about the colleague's performance or fitness for practice
- f. seeking advice from an experienced colleague, employer/s, health advisory service, professional indemnity insurer, or the ASA, if they are not sure what to do.

## 8. Maintaining professional performance

---

### 8.1 Maintaining and developing knowledge, skills and professional behaviour

The maintenance and development of knowledge, skills and professional behaviour are core aspects for sonographers and should continue throughout their professional career as science and technology develop and society changes. Maintaining and developing knowledge, skills and professional behaviour involve:

- a. ensuring continual development of professional capabilities through an active process of self-reflection, participation in ongoing relevant professional development, and practice performance appraisal processes
- b. identifying limitation in their own professional practice and actively seeking training and support to meet their perceived needs
- c. seeking solutions for any challenges or questions they encounter in professional practice, not only clinical or technical challenges
- d. engaging in evidence-informed practice, participating in audit procedures, and identifying and critically reviewing new approaches to practice and delivery of healthcare
- e. responding constructively to the outcome of audits, appraisals, and performance reviews, and undertaking further training/professional development, and reflecting on its effect where a need has been identified

- f. maintaining up-to-date knowledge of the clinical evidence base that underpins the full scope of services they provide and/or supervise, and ensuring that these services are in line with the best clinical evidence
- g. recognising opportunities to contribute to the development of new knowledge through research and inquiry
- h. contributing to the development of professional competency in peers and students by actively seeking input from others, including colleagues and other members of the health team.

## 8.2 Continuing professional development (CPD)

Development of knowledge, skills and professional behaviour must continue throughout a sonographer's working life. This involves:

- a. engaging actively in ongoing formal and informal learning of knowledge and skills to ensure clinical and professional skills are current and within their scope of practice
- b. monitoring practice critically through a range of reflective processes, which include responsibility for identifying, planning, and implementing their ongoing professional learning needs using a range of formal and informal CPD activities
- c. maintaining suitable records as evidence of appropriate professional development.

## 9. Professional behaviour

---

### 9.1 Professional boundaries

Professional boundaries allow sonographers to form a safe and effective professional relationship with the patient and family/carers. Respecting professional boundaries involves:

- a. delineating between professional conduct aimed at meeting the health needs of the patient and a sonographer's own personal views, feelings, and relationships that are not relevant to their professional relationship to the patient
- b. maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with patients, their families/whānau, other people nominated by the patient to be involved in their healthcare, colleagues, and the public, including avoiding inappropriate conduct, either verbal or nonverbal
- c. ensuring good practice when providing care to those in a close relationship, including record keeping, appropriate consent, confidentiality, and objective clinical judgement
- d. recognising that a personal relationship with a patient is often inappropriate, depending on the extent of the professional relationship and the vulnerability of the patient
- e. ensuring that a reasonable period has elapsed since the conclusion of the clinical relationship before engaging in a sexual or other close personal, physical or emotional relationship with a former patient
- f. avoiding the expression of personal beliefs to patients in ways that exploit their vulnerability or that may cause them distress

- g. maintaining a high standard of professional and personal behaviour when interacting directly with patients, or with the use of social media and electronic communication
- h. ensuring behaviour is empathetic, respectful of sociocultural differences, and is non-discriminatory.

Sonographers must never use a professional position to establish or pursue a sexual, exploitative, emotional, physical, personal, or otherwise inappropriate relationship with anybody under their care; this includes those close to the patient, such as their carer, guardian, spouse, or the parent of a young person.

## 9.2 Reporting obligations

Practitioners have obligations to report various proceedings to their employer if they have had any limitations placed on their practice. This includes complying with statutory reporting obligations consistent with relevant legislation and regulatory requirements applicable to their practice, and reporting any restrictions placed on their practice to their employer/s.

## 9.3 Health records

Sonographers must comply with all workplace policies and protocols in relation to records. This involves:

- a. establishing accurate, up-to-date, legible records that report relevant details of the examination/procedure
- b. ensuring that records are held securely and are not subject to unauthorised access, regardless of whether they are held electronically and/or in hard copy
- c. ensuring familiarity and compliance with organisational policies, protocols and guidelines, and legislative requirements that govern patient confidentiality, privacy and freedom to information for health records applicable to their workplace
- d. ensuring that records show respect for patients and do not include demeaning or derogatory remarks
- e. ensuring that records, including recorded ultrasound images and videos, are sufficient to support a diagnosis and facilitate continuity of care
- f. identifying and responding appropriately when records are incorrectly associated with the identity of a patient and/or examination/treatment
- g. making records at the time of events or as soon as possible afterwards
- h. recognising the right of patients to access information contained in their health records and facilitating that access
- i. accessing patient information only when involved in that patient's care or when there is specific permission to do so from the patient or their legal guardian
- j. facilitating the prompt transfer of health information when requested by patients or their legal representative
- k. applying knowledge of legislative responsibilities relating to ownership, storage, retention and destruction of patient records and other practice documentation.

## 9.4 Insurance

It is a legal and professional obligation that sonographers have appropriate professional indemnity insurance cover.

## 9.5 Advertising

Advertisements for services can be useful in providing information for patients. Good practice regarding advertising involves:

- a. ensuring all advertisements conform to the relevant consumer protection legislation, such as the Australian Consumer Law
- b. complying with workplace policies and protocols and state and territory legislation, including statutory codes of conduct
- c. making sure that any information published about services is factual, verifiable, dignified, and professionally restrained
- d. avoiding false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive, self-laudatory, unfair, or sensational advertisements.

## 9.6 Legal, insurance and other examinations/procedures

When a sonographer is contracted by a third party to provide a legal, insurance related, or other examination/procedure to a person who is not their patient, the usual clinical sonographer-patient relationship does not exist. Executing legal or insurance related examinations/procedures involves:

- a. acting as an expert witness, who by virtue of education, training or experience provides specialised opinion about evidence or facts of an issue within the scope of their expertise
- b. ensuring that the assessment to be performed falls within the scope of practice of the sonographer
- c. applying the standards or professional behaviour described in this code to the assessment; in particular, being courteous, alert to the concerns of the person, and ensuring the person's consent
- d. explaining to the person the sonographer's area of practice, role, and the purpose, nature, and extent of the proposed examination/procedure
- e. anticipating and seeking to correct any misunderstandings that the person may have about the nature and purpose of the assessment and report
- f. providing an impartial report.

## 9.7 Reports and giving evidence

Sonographers may be required to write reports or give evidence. Writing reports or giving evidence involves:

- a. being honest and truthful when writing reports and only signing documents believed to be accurate
- b. taking reasonable steps to verify the content before signing a report and not omit relevant information deliberately

- c. preparing or signing documents and reports within a reasonable and justifiable time frame, if so agreed
- d. ensuring that the reports or evidence given falls within the scope of practice of the sonographer
- e. making clear the limits of a sonographer's knowledge and not giving opinion beyond those limits when providing evidence.

## 9.8 Conflicts of interest

Patients rely on the independence and trustworthiness of sonographers for any advice or service offered.

A conflict of interest in practice arises when a sonographer, entrusted with acting in the best interests of a patient, also has financial, professional, or personal interests or relationships with third parties that may affect their capacity to provide their care to the patient. Managing conflicts of interest involves:

- a. recognising potential conflicts of interest that could occur during a professional relationship with a patient and avoiding such situations, including exploitation of others and misrepresentation of information
- b. avoiding conflicts of interest by not offering, requesting, or accepting incentives, gifts or hospitality that may be perceived as, and/or result in, a personal benefit
- c. ensuring duty of care is not compromised by other interests, and managing all conflicts of interest when providing or arranging services or care
- d. declaring and managing any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest in a clear and timely manner
- e. informing patients when there is a conflict that could affect, or could be perceived to affect, patient care.

Sonographers must not:

- a. ask for or accept any inducement, gift, or hospitality of more than trivial value from companies that sell or market equipment, drugs, or other products that may affect, or be seen to affect, the way the sonographer provides care for patients
- b. ask for or accept fees for meeting sales representatives
- c. offer inducements to colleagues, nor enter into arrangements that could be perceived to provide inducements.

## 9.9 Financial and commercial dealings

Patients expect that sonographers place the interests and healthcare needs of their patients first, and ahead of their own financial interests. Sonographers must:

- a. be honest and transparent in financial arrangements with patients
- b. be transparent in financial and commercial matters relating to work, including dealings with employers, insurers and other organisations or individuals, declaring any relevant and material financial or commercial interest that a sonographer or their family/whānau might have in any aspect of the care of the patient, including product or service a practitioner might endorse or sell from their practice.

Sonographers must not:

- a. exploit the vulnerability or lack of knowledge of patients when providing or recommending services
- b. encourage patients to give, lend or bequeath, money or gifts that will benefit a sonographer directly or indirectly
- c. accept gifts from patients other than tokens of minimal value
- d. offer financial inducements or gifts in return for patient referrals from other health practitioners
- e. accept financial inducements or gifts for referring patients to other health practitioners, or to the suppliers of medications or therapeutic goods or devices
- f. become involved financially with patients
- g. influence patients or their families/whānau to make donations to other people or organisations
- h. allow any financial or commercial interest in a hospital, other healthcare organisation, or company providing healthcare services or products, to adversely affect the way in which patients are treated. When sonographers or their immediate family have such an interest, and that interest could be perceived to influence the care provided, they must inform their patients.

## 9.10 Social media

Social media platforms, both personal and professional, are increasingly being used as a communication medium. Engaging with social media should involve:

- a. ensuring all legal and professional obligations to maintain patient privacy and confidentiality are adhered to
- b. ensuring any actual or suspected breaches in privacy and confidentiality are immediately reported to an appropriate authority, employer, regulator, or professional organisation
- c. reflecting on the intent and consequences of their online behaviour before participating in the use of social media
- d. ensuring that personal and professional communications are separate by using different accounts for personal and professional activities
- e. ensuring appropriate professional boundaries are maintained during any social media interactions with patients, their families, colleagues, and the public, including avoiding inappropriate conduct.

# 10. Ensuring sonographer health

---

## 10.1 Sonographer health

It is the responsibility of a sonographer to maintain personal health and wellbeing. This includes seeking an appropriate work-life balance. Managing health and wellbeing involves:

- a. being proactive in ensuring that they are safe and healthy at work, reducing the risk of injury to

themselves and their patients

- b. seeking expert, independent, objective advice for their healthcare needs and being aware of the risks of self-diagnosis and self-treatment
- c. understanding the principles of immunisation against communicable diseases and be immunised against relevant communicable diseases
- d. recognising the impact of fatigue on sonographer health and ability to care for patients by endeavouring to work safe hours wherever possible
- e. being aware of any applicable health program in the relevant jurisdiction if advice or help is needed
- f. knowing or suspecting that they have a health condition or impairment that could adversely affect judgement, performance, or the health of patients, and not relying on self-assessment of the risk posed to patients.

## 10.2 Other sonographers' health

Sonographers have a responsibility to support their colleagues to maintain good health. Supporting the health of other sonographers involves:

- a. being proactive in ensuring that colleagues are safe and healthy at work, reducing the risk of injury to themselves and their patients
- b. providing other sonographers who are patients with the same quality of care given to all patients
- c. notifying their employer and/or relevant regulatory authority if they believe another sonographer's health is putting patients at risk of substantial harm, compromising public safety, or bringing the profession into disrepute
- d. notifying the workplace and encouraging a colleague (who is not a patient) to seek appropriate help if it is believed that colleague may be ill and/or impaired
- e. recognising the impact of fatigue on the health of colleagues, including those under supervision, and facilitating safe working hours wherever possible.

## 11. Teaching and supervising

---

### 11.1 Teaching and supervising early career and trainee sonographers

Teaching, supervising, and mentoring early career and trainee sonographers is important for their development, and for the care of patients. This involves:

- a. contributing to teaching, supervising, and mentoring to provide support, assessment, and feedback for colleagues, early career sonographers, and trainees
- b. seeking to develop the skills, attitudes, and practices of an effective teacher. This includes using effective strategies to supervise trainees in the work environment and deliver feedback (verbal and written) to the



trainee on their performance

- c. ensuring that early career and trainee sonographers are properly supervised, recognising that the onus of supervision cannot be transferred, and that trainee peer supervision is not appropriate in clinical practice
- d. treating trainees with respect and patience, not discriminating against, bullying, or sexually harassing early career or trainee sonographers
- e. making the scope of the trainee's role in patient care clear to the trainee, to patients, and to other members of the team
- f. making sure that any sonographer or student under supervision receives adequate oversight and feedback, including undertaking an assessment of each student supervised, reflecting on that student's ability, competence and learning requirements, and planning their supervision based on that assessment rather than any external direction
- g. ensuring, when supervising the trainee, all aspects of the procedure are monitored until confident that the trainee can perform the examination/procedure in a competent and empathetic manner
- h. avoiding any potential conflict of interest in the supervisory relationship, for example: by supervising someone who is a close relative or friend, or where there is another potential conflict of interest that could impede objectivity and/or interfere with the supervised person's achievement of learning outcomes or relevant experience
- i. ensuring, as supervising sonographer, that patient consent for trainee involvement is obtained. If capacity for consent is in question, capacity must be ascertained and recorded by a qualified sonographer before proceeding. If patients are reluctant to be examined by a trainee, then this must be respected.

## 11.2 Assessing colleagues

Assessing colleagues is an important part of making sure that the highest standards of practice are achieved.

This involves:

- a. contributing to the support, assessment, feedback, education, and supervision of colleagues by participating honestly in peer assessment and mentorship, and providing work-based development opportunities for colleagues to enhance/improve skills and knowledge
- b. being honest, objective, and constructive when assessing the performance of colleagues, including trainees. Patients will be put at risk of harm if an assessment describes someone as competent who is not
- c. ensuring when giving references or writing reports about colleagues that the information is accurate and justifiable, supplied promptly and includes all relevant information
- d. supporting colleagues who have difficulties with performance, conduct or health.

## 12. Undertaking research

---

### 12.1 Involvement in human research

Research involving humans is vital for improving the quality of healthcare, reducing uncertainty for patients now and in the future, and in improving the health of the population. Research in Australia is governed by guidelines/standards issued in accordance with the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (Cth), and in New Zealand by guidelines/standards issued in accordance with the *Health Research Council Act 1990*.

Human research involves:

- a. respecting the right of participants to withdraw from a study without prejudice to their treatment
- b. ensuring that a decision by a patient not to participate does not compromise the sonographer-patient relationship or the care of the patient
- c. ensuring that patient participation is voluntary and based on informed consent and an adequate understanding of sufficient information about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, and potential benefits of the research.

### 12.2 Research ethics

Being involved in the design, organisation, conduct, and reporting of health research involving people carries responsibilities for sonographers. These responsibilities include:

- a. acting with honesty and integrity
- b. ensuring that any protocol for human research has been approved by a human research ethics committee in accordance with the 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research' issued by the National Health and Medical Research Commission (NHMRC) (which addresses privacy issues, and refers to the need to consider relevant state, territory, and federal privacy legislation) or the *Health Research Council Act 1990* (as applicable)
- c. ensuring that any patient information accessed for research purposes has appropriate ethics approval
- d. disclosing the sources and amounts of funding for research to the human research ethics committee
- e. disclosing any potential or actual conflicts of interest to the human research ethics committee and the patient
- f. ensuring that all staff involved in the project understand the need for, and obtain, relevant consent before undertaking any investigation, examination, provision of treatment, or involvement of patients and carers in teaching or research
- g. ensuring that any dependent relationship between sonographers and their patients is considered in the recruitment of patients as research participants; seeking advice when research involves young people

or adults who are not able to give informed consent to ensure that there are appropriate safeguards, including ensuring that a person empowered to make decisions on behalf of patients has given informed consent, or that there is other lawful authority to proceed

- h. adhering to the approved research protocol
- i. monitoring the progress of the research and promptly reporting adverse events or unexpected outcomes
- j. respecting the entitlement of research participants to withdraw from any research at any time and without giving reasons
- k. adhering to the guidelines regarding publication of findings, authorship, and peer review
- l. ensuring all research and development is managed within a governance framework
- m. reporting possible fraud or misconduct in research.