

It is fundamental to the professional responsibilities of speech pathologists that we observe the highest standards of integrity and ethical practice.

## Key Purpose Statement of our Profession

The speech pathology profession recognises the rights of individuals to possess an effective form of communication and swallowing.

Speech pathologists seek to provide a quality, efficient and effective service to individuals, the community and service providers.

We undertake to support individuals to maximise their communication and swallowing functions to improve their quality of life. This is achieved through assessment and diagnosis, intervention, liaison, advocacy, community education and research. When undertaking this work, we do so with an awareness of the broader context of the individual and/or the community, as identified in the World Health 'International Classification of Function, Disability and Health (ICF)' (2007).

## Scope and Purpose of the Code of Ethics

This Code of Ethics binds each member of the Association. As a result it contributes to responsible speech pathology practice and an ethical speech pathology community.

Members of the Association make a commitment to read, understand and then apply this Code of Ethics within all professional interactions. This commitment is renewed annually through the membership process of the Association.

The Code of Ethics includes:

- the values of our profession;
- the principles that guide ethical decisions; and
- the standards of ethical practice, and professional conduct expected of speech pathologists by their peers and the community.

The values, principles and standards that comprise the Code support speech pathologists to demonstrate professionally acceptable behaviour and take a leadership role in managing ethical issues in the practice of speech pathology.

The Code provides guidelines to identify and report a breach of ethics or professional conduct. It forms the basis for the decisions of our Association's Ethics Board.

## 1. Values

We accept these fundamental values which apply to our interaction with clients, colleagues, professionals, ourselves and the community.

### Integrity

In our professional work, we seek to protect the individuality and privacy of all with whom we interact.

In our professional judgement and decisions, we do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual preference, marital status, age, disability, beliefs, contribution to society or socioeconomic status.

# Code of Ethics

## Professionalism

We act in an objective and professional manner to help individuals, groups and communities, particularly with regard to communication and swallowing.

We provide professional services irrespective of our personal interests, aims and opinions.

## Respect and Care

We respect the rights and dignity of our clients and we respect the context in which they live.

We maintain our personal health and wellbeing to effectively fulfil our professional responsibilities.

## Quality Standards and Continuing Competence

We value knowledge sharing and the contribution that others make to our work and our profession.

We maintain our currency of professional knowledge and practice and acknowledge the limits of these.

We value clear and timely communication with our clients, the community and all with whom we interact.

## 2. Principles

We recognise and adhere to the principles of care, objectivity, accuracy and accountability in all activities.

We accept the following principles as the basis for our decision-making.

We recognise that these principles are of equal value and are inter-related.

### 2.1 Beneficence and non-maleficence

We seek to benefit others through our activities (beneficence).

We also seek to prevent harm, and do not knowingly cause harm (non-maleficence).

### 2.2 Truth

We tell the truth.

### 2.3 Fairness (Justice)

We provide accurate information.

We strive to provide clients with access to services consistent with their need.

We deal fairly with everyone with whom we come in contact.

### 2.4 Autonomy

We respect the rights of our clients to self-determination and autonomy.

### 2.5 Professional integrity

We are respectful and courteous.

We are competent and follow the Association's Code of Ethics.

We honour our commitments to clients, colleagues and professional organisations.  
We comply with federal and state laws.

## 3. Standards of Practice

In this Code, we identify the standards of practice which apply principally to:

- our clients and the community;
- our employers and ourselves;
- our profession; and
- our colleagues.

The Code is organised into these sections so that you may choose to go directly to the section most relevant to your current need.

The Standards which apply principally to one group may also apply to the other groups, therefore there is some repetition.

### 3.1 Duties to our Clients and Community

#### 3.1.1 Consent

We ensure informed consent has been obtained from clients for the services we offer.

#### 3.1.2 Accurate and Timely Information

We make sure that our clients and the community receive accurate and current information in a timely manner. This includes information relating to:

- clinical assessment and research results and the implications of these;
- the nature and extent of the services available to clients and the consequences of these services;
- the commitment required by the client;
- their rights; and
- fees for services and other associated costs.

We educate the community about communication, eating and drinking disorders, and the assistance which the speech pathology profession can provide.

We do not guarantee the results of a therapeutic procedure or of prescribed devices or therapies unless this can be reasonably expected based on the best available evidence.

We ensure our promotional and advertising materials are accurate, based on evidence and do not misrepresent the profession.

#### 3.1.3 Professional Competence

We make sure that we always practise the highest standards of professional competence.

We fulfil our undertakings to our clients.

We maintain our capacity and competence to practise. In particular, we:

- continually update and extend our professional knowledge and skills through activities such as participating in professional development, and/or engaging the support of a mentor or supervisor;
- communicate our professional opinion about client management to other team members in a timely manner;
- ensure that our clients receive appropriate referrals so as to enable them to receive comprehensive diagnosis and treatment;
- recognise our competence and do not practice beyond these limits;
- keep current and accurate documentation;
- comply with the Association's current position papers and best practise documents.

#### 3.1.4 Confidentiality

We treat as confidential all information we handle in the course of our professional services.

We do not disclose information about our clients, or the confidences they share with us, unless:

- our clients consent to this;
- the law requires us to disclose it; or
- there are compelling moral and ethical reasons for us to disclose it.

#### 3.1.5 Client Relationships

We will ensure that we do not exploit relationships with our clients for emotional, sexual or financial gain.

#### 3.1.6 Service Planning and Provision

At all times we endeavour to ensure our services are accessible and there is equity of access to services for our clients; such equity being determined by objective consideration of need and not compromised by prejudice or favour.

We are innovative and evaluate the services we provide on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

We provide services only if our clients can reasonably expect to benefit from them.

We advocate for services where a need is identified.

We will, in consultation with our clients, make sure that their interests are expressed and protected.

#### 3.1.7 Safety and Welfare

We take every precaution to ensure client safety, whether this is in everyday practice, during the conduct of procedures and/or within clinical trials.

We comply with all relevant legislation, standards and procedures so as to avoid injury to our clients, our colleagues and members of the public.

We ensure that the equipment we use (such as speech instrumentation) is calibrated and in proper working order, and our resources (such as assessment tools and communication aids) are current, valid and culturally appropriate.

#### 3.1.8 Delegation

We take proper care and use discretion to protect the well-being of clients when delegating speech pathology procedures to staff, carers, students and volunteers.

#### 3.1.9 Private Benefits

We do not sell, buy, endorse or promote the sale of services or products in ways that exploit our relationships with clients.

## 3.2 Duties to our Employers

#### 3.2.1 Professional Conduct

We work with our employers to provide safe, high quality care.

We meet our responsibilities to our employers by:

- exercising due care and attention to detail;
- providing cost-effective service while preserving quality of care;
- contributing to the development of our employers' policies and procedures;
- alerting our employers to gaps in service and proactively offering best practice solutions to these;
- observing relevant statutes, legislation and regulation; and
- observing our employers' Codes of Conduct.

If a conflict arises between our employers' policies/codes of conduct, legislative requirements and our professional values, codes and standards, we try to negotiate change through appropriate channels. If this does not resolve the conflict, we may seek the support of the Association in an ethical and confidential manner.

#### 3.2.2 Professional Competence

We ensure that we follow best practice standards. In particular, we:

- strive to continually update and extend our professional knowledge and skills; and
- maintain quality and safe care of our clients.

### 3.2.3 Views of Employers

We represent our employers' views fairly and do not put forward our personal views as being those of our employers.

### 3.2.4 Confidentiality

We treat as confidential the information we receive in the workplace.

### 3.2.5 Private Practice

Unless negotiated as part of our employment agreement we do not:

- conduct a private practice in competition with our employers;
- use the resources of employers for private gain.

### 3.2.6 Private Benefits

We do not directly or indirectly demand or accept any rewards, bribes, substantial gifts, gratuities or benefit in respect to our work.

## 3.3 Duties to our Profession and Ourselves

### 3.3.1 Professional Standards

We uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge and skills of our profession. We understand and reflect the Code in our everyday practice and dealings as a professional.

In particular, we:

- hold appropriate qualifications;
- practise professionally within the scope of our level of education, training and expertise;
- represent our training and competence accurately;
- maintain, consolidate and extend our competence;
- exercise independent professional judgment when we provide professional services; and
- identify and act on concerns we may have about colleagues' professional competence or conduct.

### 3.3.2 Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the contribution of others and any other sources of original material in our printed or electronic resources, presentations and lectures.

### 3.3.3 Professional Reputation

We uphold the reputation of our profession.

We avoid behaviour that would bring the profession into disrepute, such as:

- delivering services which research has shown to be ineffective;
- not fulfilling commitments made implicitly or explicitly;
- disparaging the skills, knowledge or services of our colleagues.

### 3.3.4 Supervision

We provide appropriate supervision.

We accept responsibility for clinical and support staff, students and volunteers who are assigned to us.

We take reasonable steps to ensure that those clinical staff and students under our supervision:

- understand and apply our Code of Ethics; and
- operate within their level of competence.

We demonstrate and discuss ethical practice with those we supervise to facilitate their ethical reasoning skills.

### 3.3.5 Public Statements

When we make a public statement, we speak on behalf of the Association when:

- the Board of Directors has agreed to this in advance; or
- the public statement is part of an agreed Association strategy approved by the Board of Directors.

When we make a personal statement or public comment, we ensure these statements are consistent with current evidence and not misleading.

We ensure Association endorsed statements and our personal comments are attributed accurately.

### 3.3.6 Development of our Profession

We contribute to the knowledge and expertise of our profession by:

- sharing research and clinical practice knowledge with colleagues while maintaining client confidentiality;
- keeping adequate records of professional services;
- preparing and keeping appropriate documentation, particularly in support of the choice of interventions and their outcomes;
- identifying and seeking to address critical issues in our profession by participating in discussion and constructive criticism within appropriate professional forums, including conferences and publications;
- participating in the clinical education and supervision of university and work experience students;
- creating and maintaining research opportunities and supporting research;
- providing opportunities for and supporting colleagues to develop their professional identity, integrity and ethical practice.

### 3.3.7 Conflict of Interest

We avoid conflicts of interest. In particular, we do not:

- use inaccurate or misleading ways to promote the sale or distribution of products or services;
- accept private financial benefits (including tips, commissions, or other rewards);
- use our employers resources inappropriately for personal needs or benefit; or
- sell products to our clients unless we reasonably believe that they will be of benefit.

### 3.3.8 Research

When we undertake research, we make sure that the research protocols:

- respect the rights of the research participants; and
- comply with the 'Health and Research Guidelines' of the National Health and Medical Research Council (2007).

We communicate the results of our research or other professional advancements in a professional manner to our colleagues and to the research participants/our clients where appropriate.

## 3.4 Duties to our Colleagues

### 3.4.1 Professional Standards

We treat our colleagues with honesty, fairness, respect and good faith.

We work co-operatively with colleagues to meet the needs of clients, the community and the profession by, for example, participating in research, student education and advocacy, and sharing our knowledge and expertise.

We support our colleagues to reflect on their practice and professional conduct. We assist them to access relevant continuing education and support when required.

We do not exploit relationships with our colleagues, students or supervisors.

### 3.4.2 Our Staff

If we manage, supervise or employ staff we:

- treat them fairly and without discrimination, bullying or harassment;
- inform them fully about their terms and conditions;
- inform them about, and involve them in, decision making processes, especially those which affect their employment;
- respect their industrial and professional rights;

- make sure that they have equitable access to resources;
- make them aware of their rights if a dispute arises and give them access to counselling support and advice;
- give them regular supervision, feedback, and access to continuing education and mentoring;
- recognise and, where appropriate, formally acknowledge their contributions to clinical practice, teaching, research or administration; and
- classify and remunerate them appropriately.

### 3.4.3 Professional Assessments

When we present a professional assessment (including a referee's report or a performance management report) about a colleague, we meet our obligations both to that colleague and to the organisation concerned by being fully briefed, accurate and fair.

### 3.4.4 Conflict of Interest

We anticipate, disclose and resolve any potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest proactively. This may include situations such as:

- the selection, supervision and/or assessment of a member of our family or someone with whom we have a close personal, business or professional relationship; or
- working in both private practice and within the public system;
- referring clients to those working in private practice with whom we have a personal relationship.

### 3.4.5 Independent Debate

We defend and promote our own rights and the rights of our colleagues to participate fully and openly in public debate.

## Using this Code of Ethics

### Understanding the Code

When renewing our membership to the Association each year we agree to abide by the Code of Ethics.

To ensure our knowledge is current and we have met our professional responsibility to know and understand the Code, we will:

- read the Code of Ethics;
- discuss the Code with colleagues through case discussions, critique of articles and position papers and reflection on our own practice;
- attend continuing education opportunities related to the Code and to ethical practice; and
- access and work through the Association's Ethics Education Package.

### What are your obligations?

As well as observing the Code of Ethics, each member of the Association must:

- comply with all the relevant laws and regulations which govern the practice of speech pathology in the State or Territory in which a member practices; and
- demonstrate the highest standards of competent practice as described in such documents as Competency Based Occupational Standards (CBOS).

### Reporting a Possible Breach of the Code of Ethics

If any member of the Association suspects that there may have been a breach of the Code of Ethics, that member must report that possible breach to the Association.

If a member is unsure whether to report a matter, it is appropriate to contact the Senior Advisor Ethics and Professional Issues at National Office, to discuss the issue.

If anyone else suspects that there may have been a breach of the Code of Ethics, that person may report that possible breach to the Senior Advisor Ethics and Professional Issues.

For details on how the Association will respond to these reports, please see the Association's *Speech Pathology Australia Ethics Board Procedures*.

In addition to this document, there are two other related documents: *Speech Pathology Australia Ethics Board Procedures* and the *Speech Pathology Australia Ethics Education Package*.

## Definition of Terms:

**Association** means The Speech Pathology Association of Australia Limited, trading as Speech Pathology Australia.

**Code of Ethics** means The Code of Ethics of the Speech Pathology Association of Australia Limited.

**Consent** means the client is aware of the:

- condition to be treated or addressed;
- the nature and seriousness of this condition;
- what the proposed intervention entails;
- who will undertake the intervention;
- how information relating to the client will be used, and who this might be shared with;
- possible risks and benefits of intervention (including the possibility the benefit may not be realised);
- the commitment required of the client, including any time or costs involved;
- the degree of uncertainty of the diagnosis and any therapeutic outcome; and
- whether the intervention is considered best practice.

Clients should also be informed of other options for diagnosis and intervention, and the likely outcome of not proceeding with any intervention.

Informed consent refers to when the client is:

- competent to give consent;
- fully informed on risks, benefits and alternatives available;
- has given their consent freely; and
- the consent is specific to the intervention or action.

Clients have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.

Where clients are unable to provide informed consent (due to age, mental capacity or other reason) a substitute decision maker as appropriate under the relevant state/territory legislation (e.g. legal guardian) must perform this function.

**Board** means the Board of Directors of the Speech Pathology Association of Australia Limited.

## References

World Health Organisation. (2007). International classification of function, disability and health (ICF). Available at <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

National Health and Research Council. (2007). Health and research ethics guidelines. Available at [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/ethics\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/ethics_guidelines.htm)

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