

Code of Ethics

Physiotherapists are responsible for conducting themselves ethically in every professional practice situation. To assist physiotherapists to determine the most appropriate ethical conduct in situations of uncertainty, the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario has adopted a values-based Code of Ethics and a stepwise decision-making model.

The Code of Ethics reflects physiotherapists' commitment to use their knowledge and expertise to promote high quality, competent and ethical care for patients and thereby instill in the public, confidence in the profession.

The ethical values for physiotherapists in Ontario spell out the acronym R.E.A.C.H. These values should be applied in all aspects of professional practice, particularly in the patient-physiotherapist relationship and when facing an ethical problem or dilemma.

Making ethical decisions is not always easy and can be accompanied by significant discomfort. While the Code of Ethics cannot alleviate this discomfort, adopting the R.E.A.C.H. values and a standard process to analyze a situation will allow physiotherapists to feel more secure in their ability to make the best decision possible and that is also in the best interest of their patients.

There are a variety of ethical decision making models available, and although one version is presented here, physiotherapists should choose a model that is most comfortable for them and meets their professional needs.

Physiotherapists should also understand that while a consistent process can be followed each time an ethical decision is required, the decision or outcome can vary and there can be differences of opinion. It is not expected that there will always be complete agreement as context is critical. The proposed actions to an ethical dilemma can include both those who are in favour and those who are opposed to the decision. Although there may not be complete agreement on one unique line of action, some actions will be more defensible and others will be less defensible.

An online learning module is available on the College website to facilitate understanding of:

- ethics in general
- the ethical values of physiotherapists in Ontario
- how to apply the values and a standardized decision-making process to ensure the best decision possible

The ability to make appropriate ethical decisions that are in the best interests of patients is an essential aspect of professional practice.

Ethical Values

Respect

Physiotherapists are respectful of the differing needs of each individual and honour the patient's right to privacy, confidentiality, dignity and treatment without discrimination.

Excellence

Physiotherapists are committed to excellence in professional practice through continued development of knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes.

Autonomy and Well Being

Physiotherapists are at all times guided by a concern for the patient's well-being. Patients have the right to self-determination and are empowered to participate in decisions about their health-related quality of life and physical functioning.

Communication, Collaboration and Advocacy

Physiotherapists value the contribution of all individuals involved in the care of a patient. Communication, collaboration and advocacy are essential to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Honesty and Integrity

Each physiotherapist's commitment to act with honesty and integrity is fundamental to the delivery of high quality, safe and professional services.

Steps to Ethical Decision Making

1. Recognize that there is an ethical issue—i.e. something is making you uncomfortable.
2. Identify the problem and who is involved—What is making you uncomfortable? Who else is involved?
3. Consider the relevant facts, laws, principles and values—What laws or standards might apply? What REACH value or ethical principle is involved?
4. Establish and analyze potential options—Weigh possibilities and outcomes. Use your moral imagination.
5. Choose a course of action and implement it—Are there any barriers to action? What information should be recorded?
6. Evaluate the outcome and determine if further action is needed—What did you learn? What can you do to prevent future occurrence?

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