

## Standard of Practice: Professional Relationships and Boundaries

### Standard of Practice

Naturopathic doctors must establish and maintain appropriate therapeutic relationships and professional boundaries with patients in a transparent and ethical manner.

### Introduction

Professional boundaries are the foundation of both patient therapeutic relationships and inter-professional relationships. The professional role places naturopathic doctors in positions of authority, trust or power in which they are expected to establish and maintain professional boundaries with patients, colleagues, students or staff members by acting responsibly, appropriately and with integrity at all times.

### Definitions

**Competence:** the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services, defined in the *Health Professions Act*.

**Standard of Practice:** an authoritative statement that describes a minimum required behaviour of every naturopathic doctor and is used to evaluate individual conduct. Naturopathic doctors should always strive to practice above the minimum standards. Performance below the minimum standard may result in disciplinary action.

**Professional boundary:** an accepted social, physical or psychological space between people that clarifies their respective roles and expectations; it also creates an appropriate therapeutic distance between naturopathic doctor and patient.

**Therapeutic relationship:** a planned and interpersonal process occurring between the naturopathic doctor and patient that is established for the advancement of the patient's health and well-being and acknowledges the naturopathic doctor's position of authority, trust or power.

### Naturopathic doctors demonstrate this standard of practice by:

1. recognizing the position of power the naturopathic doctor has over the patient within the therapeutic relationship and refraining from exploiting patient therapeutic relationships for any form of non-therapeutic or personal gain, benefit or advantage;
2. developing therapeutic relationships with patients ensuring appropriate boundaries that consider the elements of power, trust and respect;
3. not managing the primary care of anyone whose relationship to the naturopathic doctor would interfere with the doctor's objective judgement (such as a family member or other close relationship);
4. acting respectfully and responsibly at all times, and never making:

- a) physical contact that is inappropriate for the patient's condition, of a sexual nature or is a violation of professional boundaries, and
  - b) sexually suggestive comments or sexual advances with patients;
5. never entering into a sexual relationship or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a current patient or someone with whom the patient has a significant personal relationship (e.g., child's parent);
  6. refraining from entering into a sexual or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a former patient unless it can be reasonably established that sufficient time has elapsed since the professional relationship ended or was terminated and it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a power imbalance between the naturopathic doctor and the patient;
  7. refraining from entering into a sexual or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a former patient where counselling was a significant part of treatment;
  8. refraining from entering into a therapeutic relationship and/or accepting a patient with whom the naturopathic doctor already has a personal relationship unless professional boundaries will be sustained;
  9. identifying, discussing and attempting to resolve issues or seeking advice from the CNDA when the potential for compromising boundaries exists on the part of the naturopathic doctor or the patient;
  10. terminating the therapeutic relationship if professional boundaries cannot be established or maintained in accordance with transfer of care strategies and discontinuation of naturopathic care criteria described in the **CNDA Standard of Practice: Transfer and Termination of Care**; and
  11. maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and never making abusive, suggestive or harassing comments, inappropriate and non-consensual physical contact or sexual advances with patients, co-workers, students or staff members.

### Expected Outcomes

Patients are satisfied that:

- A therapeutic relationship with appropriate professional boundaries was established and maintained.

Co-workers, students or staff members are satisfied that:

- An appropriate professional boundary was established and maintained.

### Related Documents

*Health Professions Act*

*Government Organization Act*

*Naturopaths Profession Regulation*

CNDA Code of Ethics

CNDA Standard of Practice: Transfer and Termination of Care