

# The College of Radiographers Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers

## Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. March 2019.

### About these standards

This document outlines the principles and precepts required of a professional working in the wide field that is encompassed by the term 'sonography' and whose name is listed on the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers. For the purposes of this voluntary register, a sonographer is defined as:

*A healthcare professional who undertakes and reports on diagnostic, screening or interventional ultrasound examinations. They will hold as a minimum qualifications equivalent to a postgraduate certificate or diploma in medical ultrasound, BSc (Hons) clinical ultrasound or an honours degree apprenticeship in clinical ultrasound that has been accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE). They are either not medically qualified or hold medical qualifications but are not statutorily registered as a doctor in the UK".*

Sonographers should use their judgement to apply the principles of these standards to the various situations in which they practice and in their personal lives in order to maintain the widest public trust and confidence in the profession.

Sonographers who are also registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) or the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) are advised that they must also comply with all requirements placed upon them by these bodies.

Sonographers are expected, at all times, to conduct themselves in a manner that will maintain public trust and confidence in the profession as a whole. In addition, individual members of the sonography workforce have a right to expect to be treated with respect and to be free from threats, violence or verbal abuse.

While this document addresses the standards of conduct, performance and ethics required of the sonographic workforce it is also intended to enable the public to know what to expect from the provision of ultrasound services by voluntary registrants whose names are listed on the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers.

### Best practice

At the heart of best practice is a commitment to the health and safety of all service users: to integrity and honesty; to professional competence; to continuing self-development and to the development and maintenance of high standards of ethics and behaviour.

This code consists of four major areas of standards of ethical behaviour which underpin and sustain professional and personal conduct:

1. Scope of Professional Practice
2. Relationships with Service Users
3. Relationships with Professional Staff
4. Personal and Professional Standards

These are further informed by the following five philosophical precepts of:

- Autonomy (respect for persons)
- Beneficence (doing good)
- Non-maleficence (not doing/preventing harm)
- Justice (fair treatment of persons/environment)
- Trustworthiness

**In this document the following terms are used:**

'*You must*' is used as an overriding principle or duty.

'*You should*' is used where the principle or duty may not apply in all circumstances or where there are factors outside your control affecting your ability to comply.

'*Service user*' refers to anyone who uses ultrasound services. Service users might be patients or other healthcare professionals. The term also includes other people who might be affected by a sonographer's practice, such as carers and relatives

## **1. Scope of professional practice**

As a sonographer you must practice in a safe and competent manner within your own scope of practice based on education, competence, knowledge, extent of experience and registration.

### **1.1 Scope of practice of sonographers**

The scope of practice of a sonographer is wide and includes undertaking and reporting diagnostic ultrasound examinations, invasive procedures (e.g. biopsy) and interventional procedures such as drainage of ascites. They may also be involved with the administration of drugs and contrast agents. Sonographers are also involved in therapeutic procedures such as joint injections. All sonographers have a responsibility towards users of their services and a responsibility for the optimisation of any ultrasound exposure to individuals.

### **1.2 Individual scope of practice**

You must consider the requirements of your individual scope of practice and seek to develop and maintain your abilities, to recognise the limits of your competence and to practice within them.

You must monitor your practice and any protocols you work within using evidence from audit findings and from relevant research in order to develop best practice.

You will always be accountable for your actions, your omissions and your behaviours and will need to be able to justify any decisions you take within your scope of practice.

You should recognise any deficiencies you may have and take appropriate action to rectify them.

### **1.3 Development of the profession**

You should endeavour to ensure that the profession of sonography continues to develop in all fields and specialities and look for opportunities where development is possible. With this in mind you should seek out and work with others in pursuit of this goal, bearing in mind that your main responsibilities are always to patients and other service users.

### **1.4 Individual role development**

You must engage in educational planning relevant to your needs and the needs of the service arising from clinical practice.

You should seek to become a reflective, self-directed learner; able to appraise recent relevant research and to discuss and review the evidence base with colleagues in a variety of situations.

You should encourage colleagues and other members of the sonography workforce in their role development.

### **1.5 Competence and continuing professional development**

You must develop and maintain high standards of competency in skills, knowledge, acquired attitudes and behaviour and must work within current legislative and employers' frameworks. You should actively engage in learning in a constant process of development through the integration of continuing professional development (CPD) in your day to day practice.

You should adhere to relevant published standards and guidelines; for example the RCR/SCoR document 'Standards for the Provision of an Ultrasound service' (2014)<sup>1</sup> and the SCoR/BMUS 'Guidelines for Professional Ultrasound Practice'<sup>2</sup>

### **1.6 Clinical supervision/teaching**

You should be willing to be involved in the supervision, teaching, training, appraising and assessing of trainee sonographers and other healthcare professionals.

When involved in any such activities, you need to develop the skills, attitudes and practices of a caring and competent teacher/trainer.

You should be objective and honest when supervising, appraising, evaluating or assessing the performance of others as patients and other service users will be at risk if you describe as competent someone who has not yet met or maintained a satisfactory standard of practice.

### **1.7 Professional liability insurance**

There are inherent risks arising from the practice of sonography so it is important that you have adequate insurance to cover these risks. Usually your employer is vicariously liable for your actions as long as you practice within your own scope and within the limits agreed with your employer; otherwise the vicarious liability of the employer may be negated. **Inclusion on the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers does not confer any insurance cover.**

Professional indemnity insurance is available through professional bodies and organisations such as the Society of Radiographers, the Society for Vascular Technology of Great Britain and Ireland and the Royal College of Midwives. Other professional bodies and organisations to which sonographers belong may also provide professional indemnity insurance. Sonographers practising independently will need additional insurance cover; for example, for third party liabilities. Voluntary registered sonographers who are also statutorily registered are legally required as a condition of statutory registration to have professional indemnity

insurance. They must make their own assessment and declaration to the HCPC or NMC as to whether they meet this requirement.

## **2. Relationships with Service Users**

You have moral and legal obligations to service users and a duty of care to all.

You should demonstrate respect for individual dignity, belief, culture and autonomy through a commitment to the principles of consent and confidentiality.

You must neither engage in, nor condone, behaviour that causes physical, emotional or psychological distress or damage to anyone.

### **2.1 Provision of good care to service users**

You must ensure equality of care to all with no discrimination (gender, age, disability, ethnic origin, race, religion, beliefs, marital status, economic status, lifestyle, sexual orientation). You should strive for a consistency of care at all times and in all situations.

You must not be judgemental of any service users and ensure that children and other vulnerable groups are protected.

You must recognise the limits of your competence, consider the provision of appropriate health educational advice and, when deemed appropriate, consult with and take advice from colleagues.

### **2.2 Professional boundaries**

You should, if practicable, avoid providing imaging services to anyone with whom you have a close personal relationship.

In order to maintain professional boundaries, you must not use your position to enter into relationships that may exploit service users sexually, emotionally, socially, financially or in any other manner.

You must use your professional judgement as to whether it may be prudent to involve a chaperone for a particular situation involving a service user. It is good practice to offer all patients the presence of a chaperone whether or not the examination is considered intimate and whether or not you are the same gender as the patient. Please refer to the SCoR Intimate Examinations and Chaperone policy for full details.<sup>3</sup> Individual Trusts, Health Boards and Provider organisations will also have their own policies. Chaperoning considerations should be annexed to patient consent for examinations and it is advisable to ensure that the patient agrees with, and understands the role of, staff that might be present during intimate examinations.

Conversations with service users which include references to sex, politics or religion should be avoided.

### **2.3 Communication**

You should introduce yourself by full name and job title to any user of your service and ask individuals how they wish to be addressed. You should not use first or given names without gaining permission.

You must listen and respect service users' views, communicate clearly, openly and effectively and be conscious of their ability to make decisions for themselves.

You should identify individuals with communication difficulties and make adjustments to accommodate their particular problems. If there are language difficulties you should use interpreters, not family members, wherever possible.

You should develop sensitivity to the different cultural needs of patients.

Good communication with vulnerable people such as the elderly or patients with special needs is imperative; you must always listen carefully to them and respect their views.

#### **2.4 Children**

You have a professional and personal duty to safeguard and protect children and therefore must follow advice provided by employers, professional and regulatory bodies. Sonographers have a duty to report any concerns regarding the well-being of a child or vulnerable adult attending for an ultrasound examination.

#### **2.5 Consent**

You must satisfy yourself that appropriate informed consent has been gained prior to undertaking any examination or procedure and follow advice from professional and regulatory bodies on this matter. Guidelines on consent can be found in the SCoR/BMUS 'Guidelines for Professional Ultrasound Practice'<sup>2</sup> and from the websites of professional and regulatory organisations.. A person who is capable of giving their consent has the right to refuse care or services. You must respect this right. You must also make sure that they are fully aware of the risks of refusing care or services, particularly if you think there is a significant or immediate risk to their life.

#### **2.6 Confidentiality**

You must not share the medical or personal details of a service user with anyone except those healthcare professionals who are integral to the well being of the patient. Consent of the patient should be gained before sharing information with relatives, carers or whoever may accompany the patient.

You must neither misuse electronic mail nor discuss patients or their illnesses in a public place. Local policies and procedures should be followed with regard to the leaving of messages on telephone answering systems.

Service user confidence is imperative and you need to follow the advice given in 'Confidentiality: guidance for registrants'<sup>4</sup> or equivalent guidance from other regulatory or professional bodies. The HCPC have also published advice on the use of social media.<sup>5</sup>

#### **2.7 Infection control**

You must ensure that you understand and follow the principles and practice of infection control and that you minimise the risks of cross infection.

You should seek to advise service users and students on how to avoid cross infection and report instances where cross infection may arise from activities you have witnessed.

### **3. Relationships with Professional Staff**

You are obliged to co-operate with carers, other healthcare professionals, hospital staff and social care professionals. You should seek to understand and respect their responsibilities, needs, skills and working practices to ensure the best interests of all service users and avoid inappropriate criticism of them.

### **3.1 Collaborative practice/collegiality**

Frequently, you may work as part of a multi-professional team; you need to respect the skills, knowledge and contributions of colleagues from other professions and other team members. You should communicate openly and effectively with team members, acknowledge their individual roles and avoid inappropriate criticism of them.

### **3.2 Responsibility for peer behaviour and service user safety**

Sonographers have responsibilities within the work environment to ensure the health and safety of service users and should seek to avert any inappropriate activity of colleagues or others. If you have a patient safety concern, you must ensure you are aware of the procedures for reporting breaches of professional behaviour and malpractice. Malpractice includes, amongst other things, negligence, incompetence, breach of contract, unprofessional behaviour, danger to health and safety or to the environment, and the cover up of any such issues. Should you have a reasonable belief that a malpractice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur, you must approach a manager or senior professional with your concerns and follow the employing authority's procedures. Concerns you may have about staffing levels, procedures or protocols which may compromise patient safety must also be reported. You should not use 'whistle blowing' procedures to resolve a personal or business dispute. You are encouraged to contact your professional body or your statutory regulator for guidance about any malpractice concerns. In England the Care Quality Commission registers all healthcare providers and has legally constituted powers of inspection. They have a confidential hotline where issues that cannot or have not been resolved following local procedures can be discussed.

The Health and Care Professions Council has the following requirements within its document 'Standards of conduct, performance and ethics' (2016) which also apply to the voluntary register:

'You must report any concerns about the safety or well-being of service users promptly and appropriately.

- You must support and encourage others to report concerns and not prevent anyone from raising concerns
- You must take appropriate action if you have concerns about the safety or well-being of children or vulnerable adults
- You must follow up concerns you have reported, and if necessary escalate them.
- You must acknowledge and act on concerns raised to you, investigating, escalating or dealing with those concerns where it is appropriate for you to do so.'

### **3.3 Referrals**

Sonographers may accept referrals from other healthcare professionals<sup>6</sup> and also self-referrals<sup>7</sup>. In all cases the sonographer must be able to justify the examination which must take place in an appropriate clinical environment and within a clear clinical governance framework. The safe onward referral of patients as necessary must be assured. Sonographers who are working independently must ensure they have suitable and effective professional indemnity insurance in place for the range of work they are undertaking. Advice on screening examinations has been issued by the Department of Health and sonographers should refer to

this when offering these examinations<sup>8</sup>. Sonographers must not make claims with regards to their ability to diagnose or exclude disease with ultrasound that cannot be substantiated.

### **3.4 Delegation**

You must only delegate work to someone who has the knowledge, skills and experience needed to carry it out safely and effectively<sup>9</sup>.

You must continue to provide appropriate supervision and support to those you delegate work to.<sup>9</sup>

## **4. Personal and Professional Standards**

You must conduct yourself with honour and dignity and demonstrate trustworthiness and integrity in both your personal and professional life in order to maintain the widest public trust and confidence in the profession.

### **4.1 Personal conduct and deportment**

You should support the health and well being of yourself, your colleagues and your service users.

You must carry out all activities conscientiously and treat all persons with whom you come into contact with respect and dignity and without discrimination.

### **4.2 Further employment**

It is not appropriate to have any other employment outside sonography, or in any other capacity within your place of employment, if that employment conflicts with and compromises your role in the sonography workforce or brings the profession into disrepute.

### **4.3 Personal health**

You must look after your own personal physical, emotional and psychological health and avoid any contact or involvement with service users if you are ill, emotionally distressed or on medication which may affect your performance or judgement. If you identify the need for help related to your own personal health you should feel able to ask for it without fear of discrimination.

You must follow the requirements of the employing authority with regard to the need to disclose any illness and/or disease which you develop which potentially places others, including service users, at risk; for example, if you have an infection which could harm others. You should be aware of any risks which may lead to work related disorders and ensure that these are minimised. It is your responsibility to ensure that equipment and the working environment are appropriate to minimise such risks and to inform management if these are considered to be unsuitable.

### **4.4 Personal ethics**

You must not become involved in any professional activity which you believe to be unsafe, illegal, unethical or detrimental to any service user.

### **4.5 Conscientious objection**

You must report in writing to your employing authority, at the earliest date in your employment, any conscientious objection that may be relevant to your professional practice.

You should explore with them ways in which you can avoid placing an unreasonable burden on colleagues because of this. Your right to conscientious objection does not exempt you from providing service users with full, unbiased information; for example, prior to prenatal screening or testing. You do not have the right to refuse to take part in any emergency treatment. The NMC have information at:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/conscientious-objection-by-nurses-and-midwives/>

#### **4.6 Respect for the law**

You must keep within the law of the country where you live in all your professional and personal practices.

Statutorily registered sonographers are required to inform the HCPC or NMC if they have received a police caution or have been charged with, or found guilty of, a criminal offence; this applies even if outside the country where they live or work. If asked to act as a witness in a formal inquiry or litigation process related to an employment situation, you must make clear the limits of your knowledge and competence.

#### **4.7 Integrity in research**

You should either conduct research or be involved in research or its dissemination in order to further the evidence base of the profession. You must protect the interests and confidentiality of patients and ensure that you do not distort or misuse clinical and research findings.

#### **4.8 Providing/publishing information related to services**

Sonographers who provide independent professional services can advertise but must ensure that any advertising is factual, legal, decent, honest and truthful and does not misrepresent the services on offer.

If you provide independent professional services you must be honest in the financial arrangements with individuals, informing them of any fees/charges at the earliest time and informing them if the NHS is able to provide the same service free of charge.

You must not accept commission from third parties for recommending, when practicing, the purchase of goods or services related to your professional status.

#### **4.9 Public accountability and respect for the environment (sustainability)**

Sonographers have a responsibility to society, to taxpayers, to the wider community and to the environment. You should demonstrate due regard for the sustainable management of resources at your disposal and should use resources as responsibly and efficiently as is practicable.

Sonographers in both professional and personal circumstances are required to write reports and complete forms and other documents for a variety of tasks; for example, ultrasound reports, curriculum vitae, student supervision, travel claims, locum or out of hours work.

You must carry out these tasks using integrity and honesty and ensure that records are protected from loss, damage, tampering or inappropriate access.

You must comply with the current data protection legislation. You should adhere to pertinent published standards and guidelines.

#### **4.11 Minimising Exposure**

Sonographers have a duty to work within published guidelines relating to the safe use of ultrasound<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.12 Uniform/work-based clothing

You should wear appropriate uniform or work-based clothing which meets the need to inspire confidence in your patients and to afford protection against cross infection risks and other health and safety considerations. If employed your employing authority will determine the nature of your work-based clothing which will also take into account the cultural and religious requirements of members of staff.

## References

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<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/intimate-examinations-and-chaperone-policy-0>
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6. Clinical imaging requests from non-medically qualified professionals. Joint document (RCN, SCoR, GCC, GOC, CSP, NHS Alliance and RCR) London: RCN. (2008)
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9. Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016). Health and Care Professions Council.
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