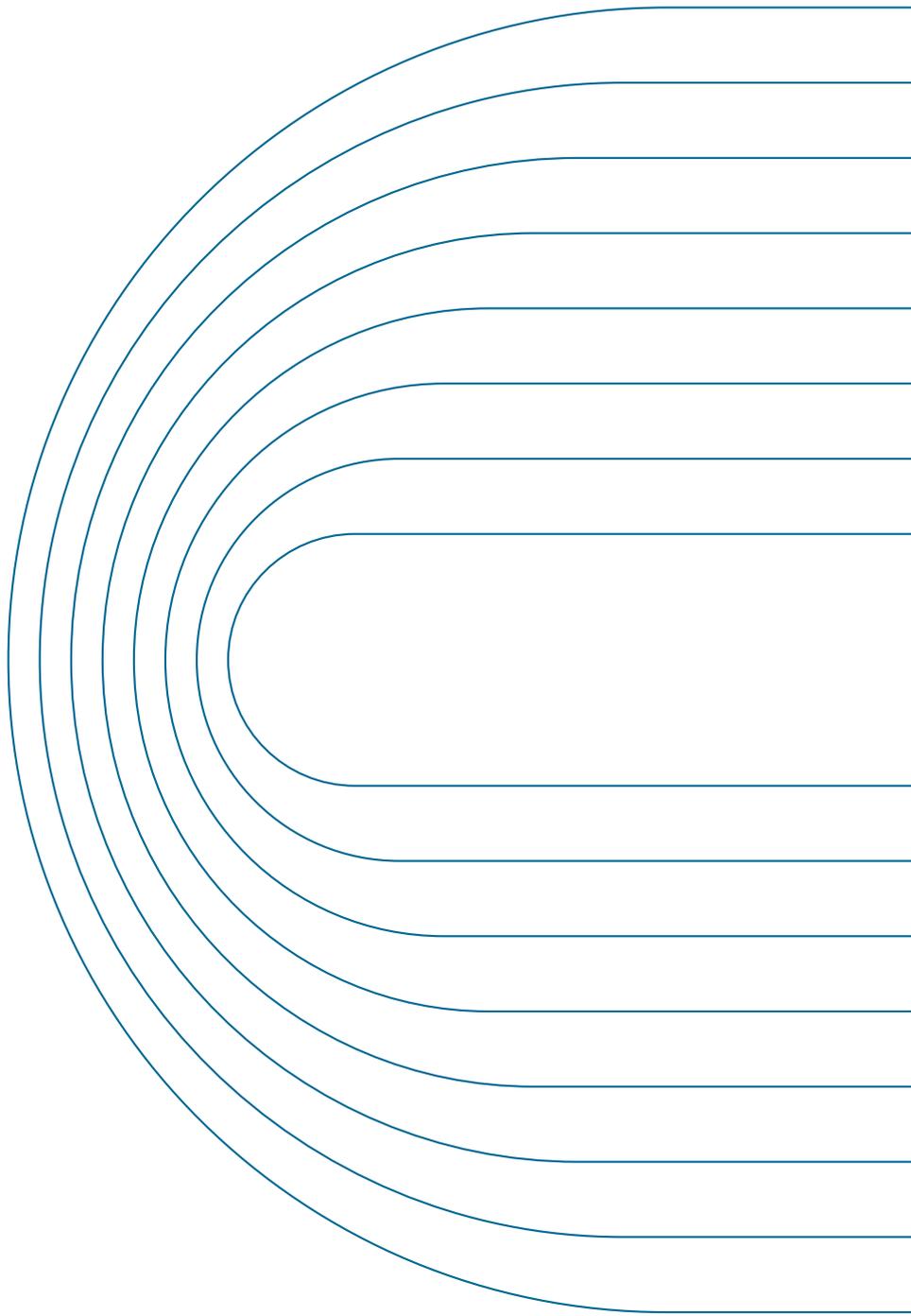


# The Code

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics  
for chiropractors

Effective from 30 June 2016



**General  
Chiropractic  
Council**





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# About us

The General Chiropractic Council (GCC) is the regulator for the chiropractic profession in the UK. Our overall purpose is to protect the public and our duty is to develop and regulate the profession of chiropractic.

We do this by setting standards of education for individuals training to become chiropractors, and by setting standards of professional conduct and practice for practising chiropractors.

Everyone calling themselves a chiropractor in the UK must be registered with us. To be registered with us, an individual must satisfy the educational requirements for registration and be fit to practise, by which we mean they have the skills, knowledge, good health and character to practise the profession safely and effectively.

We have clear and transparent processes in place for investigating and taking appropriate action against chiropractors who are alleged to be unfit to practise because of personal health issues, incompetent performance or unacceptable professional conduct. A serious failure to follow this Code and Guidance issued by us could see a chiropractor removed from our register and be unable to practise as a chiropractor in the UK.

It is important to note that this Code should be interpreted by all readers in the spirit in which it is produced: where an unintentional or minor breach of a standard has taken place, this will not automatically involve or necessitate a Fitness to Practise investigation by the GCC.

Putting patient health interests first is an important principle for professionals and, as a result, promotes and encourages trust. Our Code sets out patient expectations followed by the principles and standards: taken together, these make clear what good chiropractic looks like.

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# Introduction

This Code, prepared by the General Chiropractic Council<sup>1</sup>, sets out standards for conduct, performance and ethics for chiropractors to ensure the competent and safe practice of chiropractic.

The Code specifies the principles and standards applicable to all chiropractors whose duty is to promote the health and wellbeing of their patients. There are eight Principles<sup>2</sup>, each of which incorporates a number of Standards relating to conduct, behaviour and ethics, all of which chiropractors must practise.

The word “must” throughout the Standards confirms to the profession and informs the public that these are standards which have to be met. While a chiropractor can interpret these principles and standards in different practice settings through the exercise of professional judgment, they are not negotiable or discretionary.

The Code has two purposes: its primary purpose is to help chiropractors uphold the highest standards of care and conduct. Its other purpose is to make clear the quality of care that patients should reasonably expect from registered chiropractors. The section entitled Patient expectations is written for Chiropractors. It may also be used by patients to help them understand what can be reasonably expected of the profession.

The provision of chiropractic care in the UK is based on professionalism. This places practising chiropractors in a position of trust; trust which is earned by education, experience and by providing safe, effective and quality care.

When joining the register, and subsequently renewing their registration, chiropractors commit to upholding these standards and continuing their professional development. This is a fundamental requirement for a regulated profession. Professionalism is an integral theme throughout the Code.

Professional health practitioners not only provide safe, effective and compassionate care of a high standard but ensure their behaviour outside the workplace is equally professional. The standards in this Code are intended to help with this objective.

Every chiropractor has a responsibility to meet these standards and to apply the ethical principles underpinning them while placing the health and wellbeing of their patients at the centre of their work.

<sup>1</sup> As required by the Chiropractors Act 1994. The Code encompasses both a standard of proficiency and standards of conduct and practice.

<sup>2</sup> The eight principles are of equal importance and are not listed in any order of priority.

# Important note regarding guidance

The General Chiropractic Council produces separate, supplementary guidance, for the purposes of providing helpful and constructive advice for practising chiropractors in implementing the Code. The guidance is not exhaustive and will be updated from time to time.

Such guidance is on the GCC website at [www.gcc-uk.org/publications](http://www.gcc-uk.org/publications).

In order to keep themselves up-to-date, as required by the Standards within the Code, chiropractors must review and refer to the guidance on a regular basis.

Chiropractors must take account of the guidance, use their professional judgement, demonstrate insight at all times and justify any decision that is not in line with the guidance. This requirement will be made clear each time guidance is published.

## Patient and public expectations of chiropractors

Ensuring that patients understand, and are actively involved in, their care is a key underpinning theme of professional conduct by chiropractors.

Patients reasonably expect chiropractors to:

Put the health interests of patients first

Listen to patients and take their preferences and concerns into account.

Treat patients as individuals with dignity and respect for their culture and values.

Be trustworthy and responsible and protect patients from harm.

Care for patients in a clean and safe environment.

Act with honesty and integrity and maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct

Be properly qualified, registered and insured.

Consider all aspects of patient health and wellbeing and give care that is appropriate to patient needs.

Be honest with patients and act to resolve issues accordingly if something goes wrong.

Be professional at all times and strictly maintain patient confidentiality.

Provide a good standard of clinical care and practice

Only recommend care based upon the most appropriate evidence that meets patient preferences.

Cease care if asked to, or if in the patient's best interests, and provide guidance about other forms of care or healthcare professionals.

Carry out any assessment or administer care, as required, in accordance with the high standards of the profession while adhering to applicable regulatory standards.

Review and re-assess the effectiveness of care plans, and give feedback to patients about the care they receive.

Establish and maintain a clear professional relationship with patients

Follow current professional healthcare guidance on sexual boundaries and not breach them.

Ensure the focus of the professional relationship is on meeting patient health needs.

# Patient and public expectations of chiropractors

continued

## Obtain informed consent for all aspects of patient care

Ask for consent to care before care starts and check the patient continues to give their consent to assessments and care.

Provide accurate, relevant and clear information to enable informed decisions.

Always ask for patient consent where items of clothing need to be adjusted or removed where necessary for examination or care.

Obtain patient consent before sharing personal information with third parties if it becomes necessary as part of professional responsibilities.

## Communicate properly and effectively with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals

Take account of patient communication needs and preferences.

Explain clearly what patients can expect from care, the likely outcomes and any risks or benefits.

Listen and act upon any complaints patients might have.

Refer to or seek expertise from other chiropractors and healthcare professionals, when needed.

## Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills

Maintain and update professional knowledge and skills throughout your working life as a registered chiropractor.

Consult with other chiropractors or healthcare professionals when needed.

Ensure you and others working with patients only work within the limits of your knowledge, skills and experience.

## Maintain and protect patient information

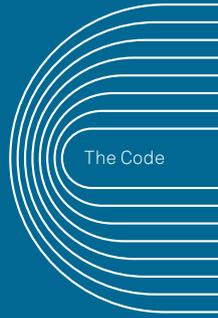
Ensure patient records are up to date, complete, accurate and legible.

Keep personal details confidential but inform patients of any breaches of confidentiality.

Store their records securely but make their records accessible to them where required as prescribed by law.

Adhere to GCC standards and to regularly read all GCC Guidance.

# Principles



As a chiropractor you must:

- A Put the health interests of patients first
- B Act with honesty and integrity and maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct
- C Provide a good standard of clinical care and practice
- D Establish and maintain a clear professional relationship with patients
- E Obtain informed consent for all aspects of patient care
- F Communicate properly and effectively with your patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals
- G Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills
- H Maintain and protect patient information

## Principle

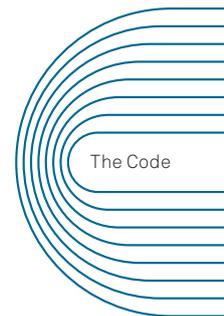
Put the health interests of patients first

# A

You must put patients' health first, respect them and ensure you promote their health and welfare at all times.

You must take account of these factors when assessing them, making referrals, or providing or arranging care.

# Standards



You must:

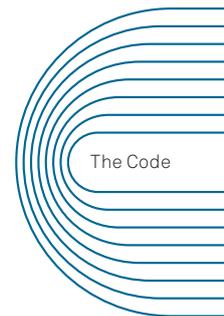
- A1 show respect, compassion and care for your patients by listening to them and acknowledging their views and decisions. You must not put any pressure on a patient to accept your advice.
- A2 respect patients' privacy, dignity and cultural differences.
- A3 take appropriate action if you have concerns about the safety of a patient.
- A4 treat patients fairly and without discrimination and recognise diversity and individual choice.
- A5 prioritise patients' health and welfare at all times when carrying out assessments, making referrals or providing or arranging care. Respect a patient's right for a second opinion.
- A6 treat patients in a hygienic and safe environment.
- A7 safeguard the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults. As a professional, you must fulfil your legal obligations if you suspect that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk from abuse or neglect by following established local procedures for reporting that suspicion.

## Principle

# B

Act with honesty and integrity and maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct

You must act with honesty and integrity at all times and uphold high standards of professional conduct and personal behaviour to ensure public confidence in the profession. You must be guided in your behaviour and practise at all times by the principle that the health and well-being of a patient comes first. You must follow procedures set down by the regulator.



You must:

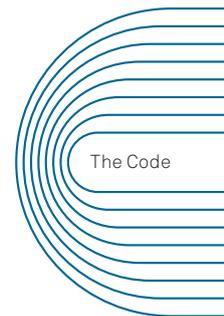
- B1 protect patients and colleagues from harm if your health, conduct or performance, or that of a regulated healthcare professional, puts patients at risk.
- B2 ensure you, and any chiropractor who works with you on a contractual basis, are properly qualified, registered and insured.
- B3 use only legal and verifiable information when publicising yourself as a chiropractor, advertising your work and/or your practice including on your website. The information must be honest and comply with all advertising codes and standards.
- B4 strictly maintain patient confidentiality when communicating publicly or privately, including in any form of social media or when speaking to or writing in the media.
- B5 ensure your behaviour is professional at all times, including outside the workplace, thus upholding and protecting the reputation of, and confidence in, the profession and justifying patient trust.
- B6 avoid placing any undue financial pressure on a patient to commit to any long term treatment that is not justified.
- B7 fulfil the duty of candour by being open and honest with every patient. You must inform the patient if something goes wrong with their care which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress. You must offer an apology, a suitable remedy or support along with an explanation as to what has happened.
- B8 justify and record your reasons for either refusing care or discontinuing care for a patient. You must explain, in a fair and unbiased manner, how they might find out about other healthcare professionals who may be able to offer care.
- B9 follow established procedures for informing the GCC if you are subject to criminal proceedings or a regulatory finding has been made against you anywhere in the world. You must cooperate with the GCC when asked for information.

## Principle

Provide a good standard of clinical care and practice

# C

You must uphold the high standards of the chiropractic profession by delivering safe and competent care to each patient. This applies to all aspects of clinical practice and patient care.



You must:

- C1 obtain and document the case history of each patient, using suitable methods to draw out the necessary information.
- C2 when carrying out a physical examination of a patient use diagnostic methods and tools that give due regard to the patient's age, health and dignity. You must document the results of the examination in the patient's records and fully explain these to the patient.
- C3 use the results of your clinical assessment of the patient to arrive at a working diagnosis or rationale for care which you must document. You must keep the patient fully informed.
- C4 develop, apply and document a plan of care in full agreement with the patient. You must check the effectiveness of the care and keep the plan of care under review. A more formal reassessment of the effectiveness of the plan of care must be undertaken at intervals that suit the patient and their needs. All subsequent modifications to the plan of care must be discussed and agreed with the patient and properly documented.
- C5 select and apply appropriate evidence-based care which meets the preferences of the patient at that time.
- C6 cease care, or aspects of care, if this is requested by the patient or if, in your professional judgment, the care will not be effective, or if, on review, it is in the patient's best interest to stop. You must refer the patient to another healthcare professional where it is in their best interests.
- C7 follow appropriate referral procedures when making a referral or a patient has been referred to you; this must include keeping the healthcare professional making the referral informed. You must obtain consent from the patient to do this.
- C8 ensure that investigations, if undertaken, are in the patient's best interests and minimise risk to the patient. All investigations must be consented to by the patient. You must record the rationale for, and outcomes of, all investigations. You must adhere to all regulatory standards applicable to an investigation which you perform.
- C9 ensure all equipment used in your practice is safe and meets all relevant regulatory standards.

## Principle

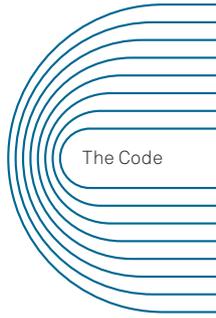
# D

Establish and maintain a clear professional relationship with patients

The professional relationship between a chiropractor and a patient depends upon confidence and trust. It is your duty to uphold that trust and confidence.

You must establish and maintain clearly defined professional boundaries between yourself and your patients to avoid confusion or harm and to protect the welfare and safety of patients and those who care for them.

# Standards



You must:

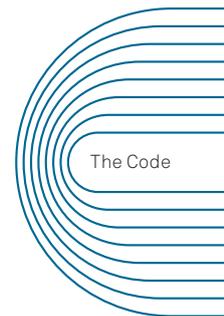
- D1 not abuse the position of trust which you occupy as a professional. You must not cross sexual boundaries.
- D2 be professional at all times and ensure you, and any staff you employ, treat all patients with equal respect and dignity.
- D3 explain the reason to the patient if there is a need for the patient to remove items of clothing for examination; if that needs to happen, you must offer the patient privacy to undress and the use of a gown.
- D4 consider the need, during assessments and care, for another person to be present to act as chaperone; particularly if the assessment or care might be considered intimate or where the patient is a child or a vulnerable adult.

## Principle

# E

Obtain informed consent for all aspects of patient care

Patient consent must be voluntary and informed. It is your duty to ensure the patient has all the necessary information and support they need in order to give it. You must ensure that, when the circumstances of a patient's care changes, the patient continues to consent to treatment. (NB: The term patient has been used throughout this principle but consent may need to be obtained from a representative chosen by or appointed to act on behalf of a patient).



You must:

- E1 share with the patient accurate, relevant and clear information to enable the patient to make informed decisions about their health needs and relevant care options. You must also take into consideration a patient's capacity to understand.
- E2 obtain and record consent from a patient prior to starting their care and for the plan of care.
- E3 check with the patient that they continue to give their consent to assessments and care.
- E4 ensure the consent of a patient is voluntary and not under any form of pressure or undue influence.
- E5 seek parental consent first if a child is to be seen without someone else being present, unless the child is legally competent to make their own decisions.
- E6 always obtain a patient's consent if it becomes necessary for the purposes of examination and treatment during care, for you to adjust and/or remove items of the patient's clothing.
- E7 obtain and record the express consent (i.e. orally or in writing) from the patient regarding sharing information from their patient record. You must not disclose personal information to third parties unless the patient has given their prior consent for this to happen – see also H2.

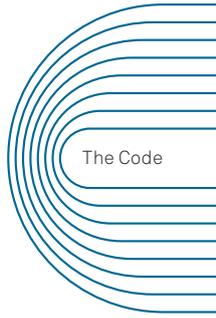
## Principle

# F

Communicate properly and effectively with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals

The relationship between a chiropractor and a patient is built on trust, confidence and honesty. You must communicate effectively with patients in order to establish and maintain a professional relationship and encourage patients to take an informed role in their care.

# Standards



You must:

- F1 explore care options, likely outcomes, risks and benefits with patients, encouraging them to ask questions. You must answer fully and honestly, bearing in mind patients are unlikely to possess clinical knowledge.
- F2 have visible and easy-to-understand information on patient fees, charging policies and systems for making a complaint. These policies must include the patient's right to change their mind about their care, and, their right to refer any unresolved complaints to the GCC.
- F3 involve other healthcare professionals in discussions on a patient's care, with the patient's consent, if this means a patient's health needs will be met more effectively.
- F4 take account of patient communication needs and preferences.
- F5 listen to, be polite and considerate at all times with patients including regarding any complaint that a patient may have.
- F6 provide information to patients about all individuals responsible for their care, distinguishing, if needed, between those responsible for delegated aspects and for their day-to-day care. This must include the arrangements for when you are not available.

## Principle

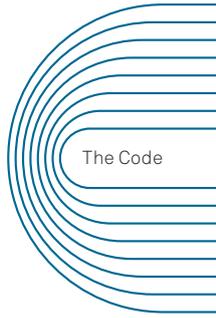
# G

Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills

As a healthcare professional you are required to use your professional judgement to recognise and work within the limits of your own knowledge, skills and competence to ensure patient safety and protect the reputation of the profession.

To assure your continuing fitness to practise you must maintain and develop your professional knowledge, skills and performance in accordance with the requirements set out by the GCC.

# Standards

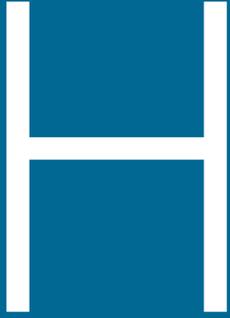


You must:

- G1 keep your knowledge and skills up to date, taking part in relevant and regular learning and professional development activities that aim to maintain and develop your competence and improve your performance and the quality of your work.
- G2 maintain your knowledge to ensure it is up-to-date and accurate in terms of the law, regulations relevant to your work and GCC guidance.
- G3 recognise and work within the limits of your own knowledge, skills and competence.
- G4 make clear the limits of your competence and knowledge to patients.
- G5 refer to, or seek expertise from, other chiropractors or healthcare professionals, when needed.
- G6 not require anyone else to take on responsibilities for patient assessment and care where it would be beyond their level of knowledge, skills or experience.

## Principle

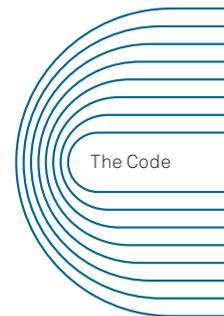
### Maintain and protect patient information



It is your responsibility to maintain and protect the information you obtain directly or indirectly in the course of your work. Confidentiality is central to the relationship between chiropractor and patient.

The records you keep must be an accurate reflection of the clinical encounter and must include any factors relevant to the patient's ongoing care, including their general health.

# Standards



You must:

- H1 keep information about patients confidential and avoid improper disclosure of their personal information.
- H2 only disclose personal information without patient consent if required by law.
- H3 ensure your patient records are kept up-to-date, legible, attributable and truly representative of your interaction with each patient.
- H4 ensure the safe storage of patient records so that they remain in good condition and are kept secure. Storage should be for at least a period relevant to the age of the patient as prescribed by law.
- H5 make proper arrangements if you close down your practice or move clinics and have appropriate arrangements in place in the event of your death.
- H6 make sure that patient records remain your responsibility, even where a patient has moved, unless you have contractually transferred this responsibility to another healthcare professional or organisation.
- H7 give patients access to their personal health records as required by law.

# Glossary of terms

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Capacity     | Ability of a patient to understand, remember and consider information provided to them. Note: The legal framework for the treatment of a child lacking the capacity to consent differs across the nations of the UK. It is important you operate within the relevant law that applies in the nation in which you are practising.   |
| Care         | <p>Interventions by chiropractors that are designed to improve health, covering: promoting health, maintaining health and preventing ill health, and addressing health needs. The methods that might be used include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– manual treatments</li><li>– the use of other technologies – for example, ultrasound, traction, relaxation exercises, applying hot and cold packs, dry needling</li><li>– advice, explanation and reassurance – for example, explaining the kinds of activity and behaviour that will promote recovery, giving nutritional and dietary advice</li><li>– exercise and rehabilitation</li><li>– multidisciplinary approaches – for example, making referrals, joint plans of care with other healthcare professionals</li><li>– supporting the patient’s health and wellbeing with other carers and stakeholders – for example, relatives, employers</li><li>– preventive measures linked to the patient’s lifestyle – for example, eating, exercise, stress management</li><li>– preventive measures linked to the patient’s environment – for example, their home, workplace</li><li>– promoting health and wellbeing – for example, using behaviour-change approaches.</li></ul> |
| Carer        | A person of any age, adult or child, who provides support to a partner, child, relative or friend who cannot manage to live independently or whose health or wellbeing would deteriorate without this help.  |
| Case history | Detailed account of a person’s history which results from the acquisition of information through interview, questionnaires and assessment of medical information.  |
| Chaperone    | Person who is present during a professional encounter between a chiropractor and a patient, e.g. relatives, carers, representative or another member of the healthcare team.   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Child                                     | England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland each have their own guidance for organisations to keep children safe. They all agree that a child is anyone who is under the age of 18. (A young person generally refers to 16 and upwards).  |
| Clinical assessment                       | Chiropractor's evaluation of a disease or condition based on the patient's report of their health (that is, their physical, psychological and social wellbeing) and symptoms and course of the illness or condition, along with the objective findings including examination, laboratory tests, diagnostic imaging, medical history and information reported by relatives and/or carers and other healthcare professionals. |
| Consent                                   | Acceptance by a patient of a proposed clinical intervention after having been informed, as far as reasonably can be expected, of all relevant factors relating to that intervention.  |
| Continuing Professional Development (CPD) | Means by which members of a profession maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required in their professional lives. The means will be explained on the GCC website and updated from time to time.  |
| Delegate                                  | Asking someone else to provide care on a chiropractor's behalf.   |
| Equipment                                 | Instrument, apparatus, appliance, material or other article, whether used alone or in combination, including the software necessary for its proper application, intended by the manufacturer to be used for human beings.   |
| Evidence -based care                      | Clinical practice that incorporates the best available evidence from research, the expertise of the chiropractor, and the preference of the patient.  |
| Health                                    | 'A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' ( <i>World Health Organisation</i> ).  |
| Investigation                             | Clinical study which contributes to the assessment of a patient which may include diagnostic imaging technology, examining systems and laboratory testing.  |
| Local procedures                          | Arrangements set out, developed and published by local authorities across the UK for the management of referrals and assessments of a child or vulnerable person.   |

# Glossary of terms continued

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Must                    | This means that the duty as set out in the standard is compulsory.  |
| Patient                 | Individuals who have been given clinical advice or assessment and/or care by a chiropractor.<br><i>The term 'patient' has been used to save space and is intended to cover all related terms that might be used such as 'client' or 'service user'.</i>   |
| Patient confidentiality | Right of an individual to have information about them kept private.   |
| Patient examination     | Clinical assessment of a patient with the intention of reaching, or reviewing, a rationale for care.  |
| Plan of care            | Treatment protocol designed to deliver therapeutic benefit to patients following clinical assessment.   |
| Rationale for care      | Reasons why chiropractors are providing treatment for a patient.  |
| Reassessment            | Formal review of whether the treatment is having the desired effect, whether changes to it are required or if the patient should be referred to another healthcare professional.  |
| Record                  | Document containing personal information and information relating to the clinical assessment and working diagnosis or rationale for care of a patient. Typically it should include: relevant clinical findings, decisions made, actions agreed, names of those involved in decisions and agreement; information provided to the patient and the name of the person creating the record. |
| Referral                | Transferring of responsibility for care to a third party for a particular purpose, such as additional investigation, care or treatment that is outside the chiropractor's competence.   |
| Representative          | A person chosen by or appointed to act or speak on behalf of a patient.   |
| Working diagnosis       | A working decision kept under review.   |



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