



## C-Obs 1

# Obstetricians and Childbirth: Responsibilities

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) regards the safety and well-being of mother and baby as paramount, and is committed to the maintenance of high professional standards of care in order to ensure optimal outcomes. Essential to this is a relationship of mutual respect and trust between mother, obstetrician and other members of the care team, based on effective communication.

The obstetrician should recognise that maintenance of high professional standards of care should reflect the standards set out in the College's Code of Ethical Conduct, including the implementation of well referenced clinical guidelines and include regular peer review of institutional and individual clinical performance.

The following outline of responsibilities is based on the recognition of pregnancy and child birth as a natural and personal process in which the role of the obstetrician is to deliver expert advice and treatment in a caring professional manner to maximise the safety and well-being of mother and baby.

The obstetrician should facilitate the development of a professional relationship with the pregnant woman, in which he or she:

- Treats the pregnant woman with consideration and respect, seeking her cooperation, taking account of particular social and cultural needs.
- Ensures the pregnant woman is given appropriate privacy.
- Ensures medical records are handled in a confidential and sensitive manner.
- Takes an appropriate history and performs a relevant clinical examination.
- Keeps the woman informed about the progress of her pregnancy.
- Provides an appropriate level of information about, and explanation of
  - pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period;
  - advice offered, tests and treatment recommended, including possible alternative courses of action.
- Gives the pregnant woman the opportunity to participate in making decisions about her own care, and that of her baby before and after delivery.
- Discusses the possibility that a woman's preferred management may not be possible in an emergency situation, and that planning for birth must be flexible and subject to modification if necessary, particularly in the event of complications.
- Acknowledges that the woman may choose to refuse treatment, investigations or participation in research. The pregnant woman should be advised that having the right to an informed choice, including refusal of advice or treatment, implies taking responsibility for those choices.

- Allows the pregnant woman to express concerns about care offered.
- Informs the patient of the limitations of his/her availability and of provisions for professional care.
- Ensures that the woman is aware of the likely costs that will be incurred during the supervision of her pregnancy.
- In the event that a doctor/patient relationship of mutual respect and trust cannot be sustained, referral to another appropriate care giver should be provided, this might include the local public hospital or equivalent.
- If the pregnant woman suffers harm, the obstetrician must act immediately to rectify that harm where possible, and to inform the patient, of what has occurred and of its likely long and short term effects.

The obstetrician is the key health professional responsible for the care of the pregnant woman and is expected to coordinate her care and act as her advocate. Furthermore, the obstetrician should develop professional relationships with others, in which he or she acknowledges the following:

- Respects the contribution made to patient care by other individuals and professions.
- Communicates effectively and respectfully with other individuals and professions in the health care team.
- Keeps colleagues well informed, through verbal and written communications and well-designed and effective handover procedures, when sharing patient care.
- Understands their personal and collective responsibility for patient safety.
- Participates in audits and reviews of his or her own performance and those of the health care team and acts to rectify weaknesses or deficiencies.
- Deals promptly, honestly and supportively with concerns regarding the competence, actions, behaviours or health of other team members.
- Where there is a responsibility for appraising the performance of more junior practitioners, does this honestly and objectively, as to do otherwise may put future patient care at risk.
- If there are reasonable grounds for believing that another healthcare professional may be putting patients at risk, acknowledges a responsibility to place the matter before the most appropriate individual or body authorised to investigate and resolve the problem.
- If having supervision or management responsibilities, must ensure that there are systems in place for colleagues to raise concerns about risk to patients.
- Should give, to those entitled to ask for it, any information relevant to an investigation into his or her own, or another health care professional's, conduct or performance.
- Should not undermine patients' trust, by either overtly or covertly making unfounded criticisms of the care, treatment or judgement of another individual care provider, professional group or health care facility.
- When providing assessment, diagnostic investigations, treatment advice or further referral on behalf of a referring practitioner, should usually inform the referring practitioner of the outcome of the referral.
- Must be readily accessible to both patients and colleagues when on duty or on call.
- Is to be actively involved in systems designed to report and investigate errors, near misses, and complaints.

- Is to be aware of, and ready and willing to analyse and implement change, based on findings of local, state, national and international enquiries into failures in patient safety.
- Facilitates the implementation of systems at the clinical service/department level and at the level of health services and professional bodies for providing frequent and regular appraisal and revalidation of the competence, attitude and conduct of obstetric practitioners.
- Supports the implementation of appraisal systems that are formalised and relevant by encouraging clear documentation of clinical, administrative, educational, support and professional responsibilities that attach to the various obstetric roles within obstetric services and against which performance can be measured at the local level.
- Facilitates the integration of departmental and health service appraisal and revalidation systems and ensures they are integrated and align with the activities of professional bodies such as RANZCOG.
- In times of rapidly changing clinical evidence, new technologies and changing models of care, takes care that appraisal and revalidation systems measure the skills, competence and conduct of obstetric practitioners that are relevant to their area of expertise and to the location and model of practice within which they work.

## References

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1. Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care and the National Institute of Clinical Studies. Charting the Safety and Quality of Health Care in Australia, July 2004; <http://www.safetyandquality.org/>
2. Australian Council for safety and quality in Health Care. Lessons From The Inquiry Into Obstetrics And Gynaecological Services At King Edward Memorial Hospital, 1999-2000. Commonwealth of Australia 2002. <http://www.safetyandquality.org/> accessed on 2 June 2006.
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4. Department of Health, UK. An organisation with a memory: report of an expert group on learning from adverse events in the NHS, London: Summary paper, Royal College of General Practitioners. <http://www.rcgp.org.uk> accessed on 13 July 2006.
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6. Irvine, Donald H. Time for hard decisions on patient centred professionalism. MJA 2004; 181:271-274.
7. The Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry. Learning from Bristol: the report of the public inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, 1984-1985. Final Report:

Section Two: Recommendations 4 to 16. <http://www.bristol-inquiry.org.uk/> accessed on 20 January 2006.

### **Links to other related College Statements**

[C-Gen 2: Guidelines for consent and the provision of information regarding proposed treatment.](#)

### **Patient Resources**

RANZCOG patient information pamphlet: 'Parents, Obstetricians and Childbirth: Rights and Responsibilities' (November 2001).

### **Disclaimer**

This College Statement is intended to provide general advice to Practitioners. The statement should never be relied on as a substitute for proper assessment with respect to the particular circumstances of each case and the needs of each patient.

The statement has been prepared having regard to general circumstances. It is the responsibility of each Practitioner to have regard to the particular circumstances of each case, and the application of this statement in each case. In particular, clinical management must always be responsive to the needs of the individual patient and the particular circumstances of each case.

This College statement has been prepared having regard to the information available at the time of its preparation, and each Practitioner must have regard to relevant information, research or material which may have been published or become available subsequently.

Whilst the College endeavours to ensure that College statements are accurate and current at the time of their preparation, it takes no responsibility for matters arising from changed circumstances or information or material that may have become available after the date of the statements.