



## Standard

# Therapeutic Boundaries

### Purpose:

The purpose of this standard is to advise Members on how to establish and maintain appropriate therapeutic relationships and professional boundaries with patients. As regulated health professionals, naturopathic doctors are in positions of authority in which they are expected to establish and maintain professional boundaries with patients, colleagues, students and staff.

### Definitions:

**Immediate Family Member:** For the purpose of this standard, “Immediate family member” means a Naturopathic Doctor’s: mother, father, sibling(s), children, spouse, grandparents, and grandchildren. Also included in the above are relations permanently residing in the naturopathic doctor’s household or with whom the naturopathic doctor permanently resides.

**Close Personal Relationship:** For the purpose of this standard, “close personal relationship” means a relationship in which the Naturopathic Doctor has personal or emotional involvement with an individual that may render the Naturopathic Doctor unable to exercise objective professional judgment in reaching diagnostic or therapeutic decisions.

**Minor Condition:** Generally, a non-urgent, non-serious condition that requires only short-term routine care and is not likely to be an indication of, or lead to, a more serious condition.

**Emergency:** Exists where an individual is apparently experiencing severe suffering or is at risk of sustaining serious bodily harm if intervention is not promptly provided.

### Appropriate Therapeutic Relationships and Boundaries

The Member fosters appropriate therapeutic relationships with his/her patients in a transparent, ethical, patient-centred manner with respect for diversity of beliefs, values and interests.

### Standard of Care:

The Member:

- introduces themselves by their name and professional title
- obtains informed consent prior to treatment
- adheres to personal health information legislation
- maintains professional social media pages as separate and distinct from personal social media.
- recognizes the position of power the Member has over the patient within the therapeutic relationship;
- does not exploit these relationships for any form of non-therapeutic or personal gain, benefit or advantage;
- never enters into a sexual relationship with a current patient or someone with whom the patient has a significant personal relationship (e.g., child’s parent);

- does not enter into a sexual 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 Member and the patient;
- never enters into a sexual relationship with a former patient where counselling was a significant part of treatment;
- does not enter into a therapeutic relationship and/or accept a patient with whom the Member already has a personal relationship and where professional boundaries may not be sustained;
- takes immediate steps to address and rectify a boundary violation when it occurs; and
- accepts responsibility for boundary crossings and violations when they occur.
- terminating the therapeutic relationship if professional boundaries cannot be established or maintained in accordance.

## **Treating Family, Friends and Co-Workers:**

Limit treatment of yourself, your immediate family, or anyone with whom you have a similarly close relationship to minor or emergency interventions and only when another doctor is not readily available; there should be no fee for such treatment.

## **Best Practices**

The Member:

- maintains practices and procedures that clearly demonstrate that provision of naturopathic services to an individual with whom the Member has a personal relationship may be inappropriate as outlined in legislation and/or if professional boundaries may not be sustainable;
- clearly, sensitively and consistently explains why the service cannot be provided; and
- does not treat a person with whom they are having a sexual relationship, except in an emergency.

## **Rural Practitioners:**

In small communities, a naturopathic doctor may be the only ND or health professional in a community and may have no options but to treat members of their community with whom they may have social or professional relationships.

## **Best Practices:**

- When there is a close relationship, always attempt to refer queries to another naturopathic doctor (if available)
- Do not discuss health-related topics with patients outside of the physical practice
- Do not discuss patients with colleagues or spouses etc. When discussing a complex case with a clinic colleague do not disclose any recognizable information (name, gender)
- Ensure that the same standard of care and policies are used. Such as: PHIA, informed consent, billing practices, receipts etc.
- When practicing in a small community it is essential that ND's remain ever vigilant about patient privacy. The best practice is not to post anything about a patient on social media; this includes posting photos of community events attended or hosted by a Member (presentations, clinic open-houses etc.)

## Gifts:

The giving and accepting of gifts are generally part of a personal relationship not a professional one.

## Best Practices:

- If the gift is more than a token, be prepared to graciously decline a gift from a patient
- Consider how to appropriately thank a patient for a token gift
- Ask yourself if accepting the gift will impact your ability to make unbiased clinical decisions
- Be mindful of self-disclosures (birthdays etc.,) that may impart gift obligations

## Boundary Crossings-Red Flags

- Sharing excessive personal information or personal issues with a patient
- Accepting and/or making personal invitations with patients
- Communicating with a patient outside of the context of a therapeutic relationship
- Providing the patient with personal contact information
- Asking a patient to write a review for them
- Texting and/or messaging on social media with a patient
- Dressing differently when treating a particular patient
- Scheduling more time than what is clinically necessary with particular patients
- Accepting gifts that are more than tokens

## Related Standards and Guidelines:

*Personal Health Information Act*  
*MNA Advertising & Social Media Standard*  
*MNA Informed Consent Standard*