

IPEM Guidelines for good practice

Working with Patients

Introduction

Many Clinical Scientists and Technologists have contact with patients. These guidelines identify the major factors that are required to ensure that the way that they interact with patients is professional, effective and considerate. In the following notes it must be remembered that ultimate responsibility for patients' care lies with appropriate medical staff but Clinical Scientists and Technologists are responsible for their own conduct. An essential requirement for good practice is a close working relationship among all staff involved in a patient's care, including the mutual recognition and respect of all staffs' roles, skills and responsibilities.

General Conduct

- Issues concerning the health and safety of the patient must be given priority over all other matters.
- All patients, irrespective of their age, gender, sexual orientation, health, origin and cultural or religious beliefs must be treated with courtesy, respect and have their privacy and dignity upheld.
- The confidentiality of all records relating to patients must be maintained. Records relating to patient history, investigations and treatment should be complete, clear and accurate.
- Conduct should never knowingly bring discredit upon the clinical scientist, his or her colleagues, department, institution or the health service.
- Waiting times should be kept to a minimum and be within times defined in charter standards and any local policies.
- The choice of diagnostic or therapeutic procedures should whenever possible be evidence based, represent current best practice and be subject to regular review.
- The limits of a scientist's professional competence must be recognised and his or her performance standards maintained by keeping knowledge and skills up to date by appropriate training.
- Research should not be contrary to the patient's interests and must be approved in advance by a properly constituted research / ethics committee, and should follow consent procedures.
- General conduct, demeanour and dress should be appropriate and professional with identification badges worn at all times.

Patient considerations

Patients attending for diagnostic or therapeutic procedures are frequently apprehensive, unwell and can have a variety of disabilities. Such factors may influence or place particular demands on our interaction with them.

- Appropriate interpersonal skills and communication style should take account of the patient's age, any sensory or motor impairment (hearing loss, visual impairment, physical disability etc.), intellectual capacity, mental health needs, effect of medication, emotional state and any pain, in order to maximise effective communication.
- Advocacy, chaperoning and interpreting services should be used when appropriate and conform to any hospital / institution policy.

Giving and receiving information

The role of both Clinical Scientists and Technologists vary, with some patient interactions being transient or with the clinical scientist being a member of a large team. However, when the contact period is long or when the scientist is in charge of a procedure or appointment session, he or she will usually assume responsibility for imparting or obtaining information.

- The scientist should introduce him or herself, giving their professional (non-medical) status.
- The patient should be provided with an overview of the purpose of their visit, its likely duration and whether any anticipated outcome or feedback will be given.
- When taking a clinical history, it is good practice to ask non-leading questions, starting with a request for the patient to outline their primary complaint (which may be unrelated to the purpose of their visit but important to the patient) and gradually focussing on information pertinent to the current session.
- Procedures that the patient is asked to undergo should be explained honestly but reassuringly. Any risk, discomfort or side effect inherent in a procedure must be stated and, where appropriate, written consent obtained according to departmental or hospital policy.
- Information should be given to patients in a way they understand. In certain circumstances it may be helpful and appropriate to include information in written form to accompany an appointment letter.
- Patients must be listened to and have their views respected.
- In some clinical situations it may be appropriate for the scientist to disclose clinical information or give advice to the patient: The scope and any restrictions to such disclosures should be formally agreed between scientific and appropriate medical staff.