Clin Chem Lab Med 2009;47(3):372–375 © 2009 by Walter de Gruyter • Berlin • New York. DOI 10.1515/CCLM.2009.082

The European Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine: Code of Conduct, Version 2 – 2008

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Abstract

In 1997, the European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EC4) set up a Register for European Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine. The operation of the Register is undertaken by a Register Commission (EC4RC). During the last 10 years, more than 2000 specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine have joined the Register. In 2007, EC4 merged with the Federation of European Societies of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (FESCC) to form the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFCC). A Code of Conduct was adopted in 2003 and a revised and updated version, taking account particularly of the guidelines of the Conseil Européen des Professions Libérales (CEPLIS) of which EFCC is a member, is presented in this article. The revised version was approved by the EC4 Register Commission and by the EFCC Executive Board in Paris on 6 November, 2008.
Clin Chem Lab Med 2009;47:372–5.

Keywords: Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine; Code of Conduct; European Register; registration.

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Received December 29, 2008; accepted January 5, 2009; previously published online February 4, 2009

Introduction

Following the expansion of the European Union to 27 countries, and thus the decreased geographical differences between the two organisations, the European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EC4) merged with the Federation of European Societies of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (FESCC) in 2007 to form the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFCC). EFCC is now the European branch of IFCC. EC4 remains as a sub-section of EFCC with responsibility for the operation of the EC4 Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine.

One of the primary goals of EC4 and EFCC is to stimulate the professional development of the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine and the maintenance of his[1)] professional activities at a very high level (1, 2). To further this aim, in 1997 EC4 set up the European registration system, in which Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine of all countries affiliated to EC4 can be registered (3–5). One of the conditions for registration is that the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine undertakes to comply with the EC4 Code of Conduct (5). This Code of Conduct is additional to and does not replace any Code of Conduct to which the registrant might be subject to in his own country.

The original Code of Conduct was adopted in 2003 (6) and this has now been revised and updated taking account of general changes in the field, and particularly of the statement on common values adopted in 2007 by the Conseil Européen des Professions Libérales (CEPLIS, European Council of the Liberal Professions) (7), of which EFCC is a member.

EC4/EFCC Code of Conduct

General principles

EFCC is the European professional organisation representing Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, a profession determined by its high level of professional qualifications. The relevant national professional society in each of the EU Member States is represented within EFCC.

In all their work, Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall conduct themselves in a manner that does not bring into disrepute the discipline and the profession of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine. They shall value integrity, impartiality and respect for persons and evidence and shall seek to establish the highest standards of quality and ethics in their work. Because of their concern for valid evidence, they shall ensure that research is carried out in keeping with the highest standards of scientific integrity. Taking account of their obligations under the law, they shall hold the interest and welfare of patients and those in receipt of their services to be paramount at all times and ensure that the interests of participants in research are safeguarded.

All registrants, having signed an application form, agree to abide by this Code of Conduct. They are also obliged to comply with the Codes of Conduct of their appropriate national registration body and national societies, where appropriate.

Key principles

1. Quality and excellence The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall put his knowledge and ability concerning laboratory diagnostics (including the indication for analyses, the reliability of the results, the interpretation of results and scientific research) at the service of diagnosis, therapy and prevention of human and animal diseases. At all times, he shall act in the best interests of patients, subject to any over-riding legal requirements, with the highest standards of competency and integrity.

2. Continuous professional development In order to optimally fulfil his duties and in accordance with what is regarded as good practice in his profession and having regard to the laws of the country in which he is working, the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall:

- maintain and develop his competence at the highest level of quality by following all relevant (scientific and practical) developments concerning healthcare in general and Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine in particular, by participating in relevant training courses and other appropriate continuous professional development programmes throughout his working life, and by practising his profession on a regular basis;
- accept assignments only within his area of competence; beyond this limit, he will seek the collaboration of appropriate experts;
- keep up-to-date with statutory codes of practice which affect his work.

The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will display his commitment to the profession of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine by taking part in the activities of its scientific societies, notably those which promote the profession, and contribute to continuing training of their members.

3. Compliance with codes of ethics and conduct The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall comply not only with the provisions of this Code of Conduct but also with legislation and with any codes of practice and standards relating to his professional work which are applicable in the country in which he is working.

4. Honesty and integrity The professional integrity and intellectual honesty of the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall be the guarantee of his impartiality of analysis, judgment and consequent decisions.

The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall at all times avoid deceit in professional

[1)] Throughout this document he/his are taken for he/she and his/her, respectively.

and scientific respect, such as fraud, plagiarism, concealment, improper omission of information, and expressing incorrect or misleading opinions in both clinical work and in research.

The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will not accept any obligation that brings him into conflict with his professional independence. In particular, he undertakes:

- not to solicit for, or accept, gifts, pecuniary advantages or benefits from the medical product or diagnostics industry, unless they are of low monetary value and relevant to the practice of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine;
- not to solicit for, or accept, hospitality at sales promotions, symposia or congresses and the like unless this hospitality is reasonable in level and secondary to the main purpose of the meeting and does not extend to persons other than health professionals;
- not to accept financial support from the industry, directly or indirectly, other than for events for purely professional and scientific purposes; such gifts must always be reasonable in level and remain subordinate to the main scientific objective of the event and must not be extended to persons other than health professionals.

5. Relationships with others The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine shall at all times act with courtesy, honesty and integrity in his relationships with patients and others, including professional colleagues, and must not engage in any activity or behaviour which would bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession.

He must work constructively within a team, and communicate and co-operate with other health professionals and others caring for patients.

He must not abuse his professional position to establish improper relationships with patients, to persuade patients to give or lend money or benefits, to recommend treatments or investigations which are not in the patient's best interests, or to withhold investigations or treatments.

He must report concerns to employers or regulatory bodies where he believes a colleague's health, conduct or performance is a threat to a patient.

6. Independence and impartiality The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine must exercise his professional judgment within the framework of his responsibilities impartially and objectively, after taking into account all relevant circumstances, in the best interests of his patient without pressure from external sources or conflicts of interest. He will ensure that the interests of participants in research are safeguarded and are paramount.

The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will serve the individual patient to the best of his ability and provide the general public with such information, within his field of competence, to enable a proper understanding of healthcare matters of public interest.

8. Confidentiality Without prejudice to legislation on privacy applicable in the country where he is working, the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will consider himself bound to respect the confidentiality of information obtained by him in his professional work. The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will be on his guard against misuse of such information. He will ensure that information about a patient or other individuals is not disclosed to others except in specified circumstances, such as to other health professionals involved in the care of the patient, and, where possible, with the informed consent of the patient.

9. Conflict with moral and ethical beliefs The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine is not obliged to offer to provide a professional service in ways which conflict with his own moral or religious beliefs, but must respect the moral, religious and cultural beliefs of individual patients. He has an obligation to provide information on where the service requested can most conveniently be obtained from a professional colleague, or details of the institution or professional organisation from which that information can be obtained. If he has agreed to provide a service, he must set aside any personal religious, cultural, philosophical or other convictions. He must ensure equitable access to his services to all who are entitled to use them.

10. Delegation and supervision As head and/or member of the team operating in the Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine laboratory, the Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine will, given the specific circumstances of the situation concerned:

- obtain a clear definition of the services required of him and/or his team;
- ensure that all activities in the laboratory are organised and executed as accurately and as quickly as possible;
- protect the safety and well-being of his colleagues and be conscious of nature and the environment;
- show respect for superiors, colleagues and subordinates by taking due account of their requirements and aspirations, provided they conform to the laws and ethics of their profession;
- strive for a high level of technical achievement which will also contribute to and promote a healthy and agreeable environment for his colleagues;
- ensure that any member of support staff to whom a task is delegated has the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to undertake that task effectively and efficiently, and that appropriate supervision is in place;
- retain responsibility for the task delegated, except when the delegatee is at the same level of professional qualification.

11. Professional indemnity insurance The Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine should have in place a form of insurance in respect of potential liabilities to patients and, where applicable, to third parties arising out of his professional work. This should be at a level sufficient to ensure that a justified complainant would be adequately compensated. Such insurance may be provided through a national arrangement for services provided by the state, by an employer, through membership of a professional association or by the individual practitioner. Exceptionally, and by formal prior arrangement, the risk may be borne by the recipient of the service, in Member States where legislation permits such an arrangement. The patient should be made aware of these arrangements.

12. Advertising Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine practise in both the public and private health sectors and the relative distribution between the two varies considerably between the Member States. In Member States where advertising of a Specialist's services is permitted, any such advertising must be accurate, honest, legal, decent and proportionate, and must focus solely on the professional services offered. It must also conform to any national or EU legislation and guidelines in this area.

Sanctions

Should a Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine not keep to a part of this Code of Conduct, his national regulatory body (where applicable) and his national society will be responsible for determining culpability and sanctions. However, if a registrant is subject to disciplinary sanction (e.g., suspension, removal) from their national register, EC4 will apply the same sanction to the individual in relation to the EC4 Register.

Transparency

The national professional societies are listed, with links, on the EC4 Register website (8) where there are also links to this Code of Conduct and other documents. There are also links to the documents from the website of the European Economic and Social Committee/Single Market Observatory Self- and Co-regulation Database (9). Public access to the names held by the national regulatory bodies is available in some countries. At present, public access to the names of registrants on the EC4 Register is not available but may be in the future. However, this will require consent from each individual.

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