

**Patient Advocate Certification Board**

**(proposed)**

**Ethical Standards and Best Practices  
for a  
Board Certified Patient Advocate (BCPA)**

**A. Preface**

The Patient Advocate Certification Board (PACB) is pleased to present these Ethical Standards and Best Practices for the patient advocacy profession. Agreement and adherence to this document is a condition of receipt of the Certified Professional Patient Advocate credential.

The Patient Advocate Certification Board is an organization of professionals – including, but not limited to, healthcare and patient advocates, patient navigators, case managers, and others who work on behalf of patients, communities, and family caregivers – who share the goal of promoting safe, effective, and compassionate healthcare services. Certified Professional Patient Advocates work with individual clients who need assistance navigating complex medical situations by partnering with them, seeking to empower them, and informing their ability to make autonomous decisions.

Advocacy is a dynamic and developing field. Over time, these Ethical Standards and Best Practices may be revised. The Patient Advocate Certification Board welcomes questions, comments, and concerns about the standards or their implementation in professional practice.

## **B. Definitions**

1. **Patient advocate:** A patient advocate provides services to patients and those supporting them who are navigating the complex healthcare continuum. Advocates work directly with clients (or with their legal representatives) to ensure they have a voice in their care and information to make informed decisions. Advocates may work independently or in medical or other organizational settings. They serve individuals, communities, disease-specific populations, and family caregivers.
2. **Professional patient advocacy relationship:** There are two categories of professional relationships for patient advocates.

**Independent Patient Advocacy** – Independent advocates work directly for a client and are hired by that client or by a guarantor (family, lawyer, etc.) on behalf of that client. A professional patient advocacy relationship in this category exists when there is a service agreement or contract that defines the responsibilities of each party.

**Institutional Patient Advocacy** – Institutional advocates are hired by a healthcare-related institution or corporation (hospital, managed care company, cancer center, social service agency, etc.) to advocate and navigate for clients served by that institution or corporation. A professional patient advocacy relationship in this category exists when a client agrees to be assisted by the patient advocate.

Any time there is a potential conflict of interest in the structure of a professional patient advocacy relationship – e.g. when the client is not the guarantor, or when an advocate is paid by an institution, rather than the client – advocates must take extra care in clarifying their professional and ethical responsibilities. In such cases, patient advocacy contracts or agreements can help to clearly establish the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all involved parties.

3. **PACB Certified Professional Patient Advocate:** A PACB Certified Professional Patient Advocate agrees to practice in accordance with the PACB Competencies for Certification and pledges accountability to the PACB Ethical Standards and Best Practices.

## **C. Ethical Standards and Best Practices**

### **1: The Role of an Advocate**

The role of an advocate is informational, not medical. Advocates are committed to helping clients and client communities make informed choices and access resources. Advocates shall not recommend specific treatment choices, provide clinical second opinions, or perform hands-on care of any type, even if they possess clinical credentials.

### **2: Transparency and Honest Disclosure**

Advocates are committed to integrity and transparency in the conduct of their practices. They develop clear client expectations related to their scope of practice. Advocates have a responsibility to ensure that clients are fully aware of all conflicts of interest that might result from their conditions of employment.

Advocates providing fee-for-service assistance have an obligation to disclose their fees, training, education, experience, and credentials. They must also disclose existing contractual relationships with manufacturers or distributors of products or providers of services they recommend or use to assist their clients. Fee-for-service advocates must provide their CV/resume and references upon request.

Advocates providing fee-for-service assistance are obligated to present their clients and guarantors with service agreements that clearly define their scope of practice, fee schedule, and terms. They share with the client the projected length and scope of the relationship keeping in mind criteria for appropriate termination of that relationship.

### **3: Protecting Confidentiality and Privacy**

Advocates respect each client's right to privacy and abide by all relevant laws and regulations pertaining to the confidentiality of personal information and personal identifiable information. Advocates shall, at all times, safeguard and protect the confidentiality of all medical records, and the identity of, and communications with, their clients.

Advocates will promote client's choices concerning what health information is shared with others (family, friends, etc.), including the guarantor, in circumstances where the guarantor is not the client.

### **4: Fostering Autonomy**

Advocates shall treat all clients with compassion and respect. They will honor their clients' personal values concerning care and the right to be involved in all decisions that affect their care. Advocates uphold and respect all patients' rights by promoting recognition of existing statutory rights and supporting the rights of disenfranchised people and communities to receive fair and equal treatment.

Advocates are dedicated to promoting their clients' right to exercise autonomous decision-making and meaningful informed consent. They strive to ensure that their clients are fully aware of and understand all care and treatment options, including potential risks, benefits, and available alternatives. Advocates will attempt to provide clients with complete information to facilitate informed decision-making. Advocates respect their clients' dignity and the freedom to make decisions grounded

in each individual's cultural, spiritual, and ethical context. An advocate's role is to ensure that a client's wishes, if known, are the guiding force behind decisions affecting medical care and the withholding of care.

In the event that a legally-designated surrogate becomes a client's decision-making agent, an advocate is encouraged to faithfully convey to the surrogate the client's relevant medical history, as necessary, as well as any personal conversations in which the client may have expressed certain wishes to the advocate.

Advocates shall encourage clients to complete necessary documentation as appropriate: e.g., Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare; Durable Power of Attorney for Financial Affairs; Advanced Directives.

#### **5: Provision of Competent Services**

Advocates have a responsibility to inform clients of their specific areas of proficiency and only to advise clients within those areas in which they have demonstrated expertise. If a client needs assistance in an area in which an advocate does not have sufficient knowledge or training, the advocate is obligated to refer the client to the appropriate system or resource for assistance.

Advocates ensure that they have adequate referral systems in place to assist clients who need services the advocate is unable to provide. Advocates express respect towards their clients and towards other medical and non-medical professionals with whom they work.

#### **6: Avoidance of Impropriety and Maintenance of Professional Boundaries**

Advocates may not accept remuneration for making referrals to other providers or services, nor steer clients to products or services from which they will profit financially or earn a commission. Advocates may not accept paid advertising on their websites for products or from other service providers. However, advocates may inform clients about useful products or services after performing due diligence on the product, service, or provider if they are satisfied with the quality and efficacy of the product or service and the integrity of the provider. Under no circumstances may an advocate require that a client purchase or subscribe to any outside service in order to benefit from the advocate's services.

Advocates do not participate in dual relationships with their clients. Advocates recognize and maintain boundaries that establish the appropriate limits of professional relationships. They regularly assess client relationships in order to maintain professional boundaries. When professional boundaries are jeopardized, advocates assist their clients in finding substitute advocates and remove themselves from the situation.

#### **7: Avoidance of Discriminatory Practices**

Essential to the profession of advocacy is the belief that equal access to appropriate healthcare and treatment is the right of each individual. Advocates strive for clients' equal access to health services without regard to age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, or religion/spiritual

practice.

Advocates are committed to assisting clients of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They shall be mindful of the cultural context of medicine and clients' cultural contexts by respecting clients' individual perspectives. When unfamiliar with the client's ethnic background, advocates will study appropriate materials and incorporate their substance into the provision of the client's healthcare.

**8: Continuing Education & Professional Development**

Advocates are committed to lifelong learning to keep their knowledge and skills current, hone their professional expertise, and keep abreast of current conditions in the rapidly changing healthcare environment. Advocates participate in the continued learning of their colleagues by sharing information and resources for the benefit of the profession and the public.

Where applicable, advocates shall obtain continuing education credits as dictated by professional license and regulatory/credentialing bodies. Advocates shall consult with colleagues regarding challenging client situations as an opportunity to learn. In order to foster development of the advocacy profession and of junior colleagues, advocates will participate in the professional development of other Patient Advocate's by mentoring or participating in professional education programs, as appropriate.

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