



MEDICAL BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

TITLE: Statement on Providing Care to Yourself and Those Close to You

EFFECTIVE DATE: December 2007

POLICY STATEMENT

It is generally unwise for medical practitioner to treat people with whom they have a personal relationship rather than a professional relationship. Providing care to yourself or those close to you is neither prudent nor practical due to the lack of objectivity and discontinuity of care.

Introduction

1. All patients are entitled to a good standard of care from a doctor; it is the responsibility of the doctor to provide care that meets acceptable clinical and ethical standards of the profession. An objective assessment of the patient and the medical condition is necessary for good practice and care.
2. Every doctor should have his or here own general practitioner because an individual doctor cannot provide objective assessment of his or her own condition.

Assessment of yourself and those close to you

3. Self-assessment may impair judgement about the diagnosis or treatment. Concern about personal and professional commitments may mean that you do not seek and receive proper care.
4. A lack of objectivity can also be a problem when providing care to family members, those you work with and close friends. Those with whom you have close emotional ties should have a general practitioner who can provide appropriate care after an objective medical assessment.

When Providing Care to Yourself or Those Close to You is Inappropriate

5. The following are specific situations when treating yourself, family members, people you work with and friends that should be avoided:
 - Prescribing or administering drugs of dependence;
 - Prescribing psychotropic medication;
 - Undertaking psychotherapy;
 - Issuing certificates
 - Performing surgery (unless an appropriate referral process has been followed).
6. It is also inappropriate to provide care to yourself and those close to you in the majority of other clinical situations.

Exceptions in Certain Situations

7. The Board acknowledges that there are some exceptions where providing care to yourself or those close to you may be appropriate:

- In an emergency, doctors may provide treatment to themselves and those close to them until another doctor is available.
- If the doctor is employed in a small community where there are people close to them who are patients because of access issues. However, in this situation there may be additional pressures and doctors should be aware that objectivity might be compromised. The Board recommends a low threshold for referring these patients to an independent doctor for consultation.

Steps that should be taken when providing care to yourself or those close to you

8. When there is no reasonable alternative to providing care to yourself or someone close to you, you should take extra care to ensure that:
 - The care involved an adequate assessment of the patient's condition, based on the history and clinical signs and an appropriate examination.
 - You refer the patient to another doctor, when indicated.
 - The details of the consultation are recorded in clear, accurate and contemporaneous patient records that report the relevant clinical findings, the decision made, the information given to the patient and any drugs or other treatment prescribed.
 - The care is monitored by another doctor.

*** Note**

Self care and care of those close to you constitutes medical practice as does prescribing therefore current registration is required.

The Board recognised the Medical Council of New Zealand for allowing the use of its 'Statement on providing care to yourself and those close to you'.