Corporate Code of Ethics

Introduction

Austin Health is an agency of the Victorian Government operating under the Health Services Act 1998. Agencies operating under the Act are required to ensure that resources are used efficiently and that there is monitoring and improving of the quality of health services they provide. To achieve these objectives, agencies and their boards are encouraged to formulate and implement best practice policies and principles.

Best practice agency boards will develop a Mission Statement or Statement of Purpose, which clearly outlines the results or outcomes to be achieved. The Statement of Purpose (adopted by the then A&RM in 1995/96) is as follows:

**Austin Health is a world leading medical centre dedicated to providing the highest standards of patient care for the community and veterans in a compassionate environment while committed to the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research.**

Indivisible from this Statement of Purpose is a further statement, which codifies the values, principles and practices that underlie it. Such a statement is commonly called a Corporate Code of Ethics.

Ethics is a widely accepted science or discipline which defines what is good or bad, what is right or wrong and what are the moral duties and obligations of human beings towards each other. Codes of Ethics such as the Hippocratic Oath have been adopted by certain professions and trades whose members have the potential to exercise power and influence over others, hospitals and medical centres which daily deal with dependent and vulnerable people should also have a Code of Ethics. Such institutions have a duty to ensure that both those who serve within them and those who are served by them are aware of the values and principles to which the institute is committed and which govern the quality of the services it offers.

Ethical standards and the values on which they are based may vary between cultures but the values within this Code of Ethics are those generally accepted within the community of which Austin Health is a part. The primary emphasis of the Code is directed towards the compassionate care both of our patients and those closest to them. The Code also affirms that the principles of Justice and Fairness will apply to all Austin Health’s professional and commercial dealings both internally and externally. Adherence to the values, principles and practices outlined in the Austin Health Corporate Code of Ethics will apply to everyone who is engaged in its activities, from the board room to the boiler room.

Austin Health has adopted this Corporate Code of Ethics as an expression of its commitment to the community that it will apply the highest ethical standards to all its activities.
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Values

Austin Health upholds the following values as being self-evident and having both intrinsic worth and universal application:

- The inherent dignity of each and every human being
- The autonomy of the individual
- The exercise of care and compassion
- The practice of justice, fairness, honesty and integrity
- The proper stewardship of resources
- The advancement of knowledge and learning
- The striving for excellence

Principles

In upholding these values Austin Health will be guided by the following principles:

1. All individuals of whatever culture class or belief will be treated with respect, including and especially those who are intellectually or physically impaired or disabled, incompetent or deceased.
2. All individuals, especially patients, have the right to make or be involved in decisions which affect their lives, and where applicable this right extends to include consultation with those who are close to the patients concerned.
3. The primary concern of Austin Health will be the provision of compassionate care and treatment to its patients with every effort made to relieve suffering.
4. The principle of justice will be observed in the avoidance of all discriminatory practices and the provision of equal opportunity.
5. Organisational activity including administration will be conducted in a fair, open and collaborative manner.
6. Responsibility and accountability will be exercised in all decisions and actions at every level to ensure that the best use of resources is achieved.
7. The importance of research and teaching in every clinical discipline will be recognised and every effort made to ensure that all research is conducted at the highest scientific and ethical standards.
8. Austin Health acknowledges that it shares both a natural and a cultural environment with a wider community and affirms its commitment to respect and nurture those environments.
9. The pursuit of excellence will be encouraged not only in clinical practice but in every field of activity with the aim of improving standards of service to the community.

Practices

In accordance with the “best practice” policy of Austin Health, the principles enunciated in this Corporate Code of Ethics will be implemented as follows.
1. **Respect**
The conduct of all staff will reflect a respect for the uniqueness of every individual regardless of disability, impairment or incompetence.

Such respect will be accorded to patients not only when they are living but also when they are deceased.

“End of life” decisions will be made with due regard to the patient’s known wishes, the responses of the next of kin and the relevant Austin Health policies.

2. **Autonomy**
Patients will be encouraged to believe that their participation in decisions relevant to their treatment is both important and valued. They will be provided with an open and honest provision of information relevant to their condition, will be encouraged to ask questions and when clinically viable, given time to reflect and consult before responding.

Whenever possible, information will be made available both orally and in written form and in the patient’s customary language.

Clinicians will explain clearly to patients the difference between procedures which are accepted practices and those which are related to research. In the latter case, Austin Health research ethics policies will be strictly observed.

3. **Compassion**
Every effort will be made to relieve patients of unnecessary suffering as speedily and effectively as possible.

Special efforts will be made to identify and respond to unarticulated fears and anxieties.

Where possible the needs of next of kin and others closely related to the patient will be addressed with care and concern.

4. **Justice**
Austin Health recognises that this principle applies to dealings with staff and “stakeholders” as well as with patients.

All patients will be afforded best possible treatment and care appropriate to their medical condition. There will be no discrimination based on race, culture, religion, sex or position in society.

Treatment will be determined according to need, likely benefit, and the responsible use of resources.

Legislation related to discrimination, harassment and equal opportunity will be observed both in the spirit and the letter of the law.

Grievance issues will be addressed speedily and fairly.
5. **Collaboration**
Mutuality of respect will be encouraged between all professions engaged in clinical treatment and patient care. The sharing of information and decision making will be practiced in the best interest of the patients.

Unnecessary duplication of examinations, investigations and patient interviews will be avoided.

External agencies and individuals including ministers of religion who contribute to the patient’s welfare will be afforded respect and assistance.

Before any innovative or experimental procedures are undertaken they will be discussed with other health professionals engaged in the patient’s care.

6. **Accountability**
Clear guidelines of responsibility for the care of patients will be established.

Health care professionals will be encouraged to express concerns without fear of recrimination.

The allocation of human, financial and technical resources will be in accord with the hospital’s policies and the spending of public monies.

There will be a continuing review of resource allocation in the light of consequent outcomes.

7. **Research and Teaching**
All professions represented at Austin Health will be encouraged to engage in high quality research both in clinical practice and academic study.

All research conducted within or under the auspices of Austin Health will be subjected to scrutiny as to its scientific value and validity and according to the high ethical standards which the hospital holds.

As a teaching hospital Austin Health will endeavour to provide students of relevant disciplines with opportunities for clinical study at the highest standard.

Austin Health will encourage and support the conduct of forums, seminars and other methods of education designed to assist staff and the wider community to a better understanding and practice of health related issues.

8. **Environment**
Austin Health acknowledges that it shares a common natural environment with the surrounding community and will ensure that any potential threat to this environment emanating from the hospital will be speedily and effectively identified and addressed.

Austin Health will support community initiatives for the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

Recognising the multi cultural character of the social environment in which it operates, Austin Health will encourage community involvement in its activities, which reflects this multicultural character.
9. **Excellence**

Austin Health will promote the pursuit of excellence at every level of its activities. Continuous quality improvement programs will be regarded as fundamental to this process.

Austin Health will recognise and appropriately reward outstanding achievements on the part of individuals and departments.

Austin Health will strive for world leadership in its clinical, research, teaching and administrative practices.

(AMENDED TO REFLECT NAME CHANGE TO AUSTIN HEALTH APRIL 2003)