

## Preface

The *Code of Ethics* and *Guide to Ethical Conduct for Residential Aged Care* (13 August 2001) apply in relation to residential aged care services provided under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. The six peak organisations in aged care support the implementation of the *Code* and the *Guide* for a trial period. The adoption of these protocols in no way affects the operation of the *Aged Care Act 1997* and the Principles under the Act.

One of the purposes of the *Code* and the *Guide* is to “provide a basis which will enable individual organisation to develop written protocols which will support and inform the ways in which care is delivered under the Code and the Guide.”

To assist organisations in that task this *Handbook of Ethical Protocols* is offered as a model. As a model the *Handbook* may be adopted by homes, or used as a resource for those homes to prepare their own ethical protocols.

An ethical protocol states a shared standard of moral conduct that an organisation or a professional group recognises and adopts as its own. An ethical protocol differs from legal guidelines in that the law represents society’s minimal requirements for its members. An ethical protocol is not a restatement of law but it should require adherence to legal obligations. An ethical protocol may signify higher standards of professional commitment than is strictly required by the law, but it should never be lower.

Ethical protocols add to the technical and legal requirements of care. They shape the way in which those requirements are met and foster the well being of the care recipient and the integrity of the professionals who provide the care.

The *Handbook* assumes that those who deliver care are qualified for the tasks they undertake. Accordingly the *Handbook* does not repeat the technical details of how professionals do their job except where it is necessary to make clear what constitutes best ethical practices in accordance with the *Code* and the *Guide*.

There are occasions when an event in the delivery of aged care raises matters of particular ethical difficulty. The protocols can be used to guide discussion and education about practical ethical responses to such events. Sometimes ethical decisions are implemented by providers, by medical practitioners and other attending professionals, by nursing staff, and by other employed carers.

These ethical protocols have been developed after extensive consultation with aged care residents, their families, doctors, nurses and other health practitioners and representative bodies. They establish a particular standard of care which residents and their families have a right to expect from homes which have adopted the *Code*.

The *Handbook* has been prepared by Southern Cross Bioethics Institute (Adelaide, South Australia) and written by Dr John Fleming (Director of Southern Cross Bioethics Institute), Dr Nicholas Tonti-Filippini (Consultant Ethicist and Sessional Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Melbourne), and Dr Joanne Ramadge (RN, Specialist Nurse Clinical Adviser in Aged Care). Assistance in preparing the case studies was rendered by Jill Ashby RN, Dip App Sci (Nursing), B Nursing.

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