

Multidisciplinary Group Practice Code Numbers

The healthcare environment is always changing due to regulatory updates and new practice methods, notably, the recent amendments to the Ethical Rules by the Health Professions Council of South indicate a significant shift towards supporting multidisciplinary group practices. The implications of these changes impact medical schemes, administrators and the healthcare professionals themselves.

As BHF prepares to implement these changes, a comprehensive analysis has been carried out to grasp their implications, which need to be interpreted within the context of the current legal frameworks governing medical schemes and health professions.

Starting on 01 May 2024, BHF will begin processing applications and allocating multidisciplinary group practice numbers in accordance with the new Ethical Rules.

1. In Government Gazette No 49720 of 17 November 2023, the Health Professions Council of South Africa made changes to its Ethical Rules to allow for multidisciplinary group practices. The new Ethical Rules must be understood and interpreted in the context of the existing legal frameworks governing medical schemes and the health professions.
2. The Regulations under the Medical Schemes Act already accommodate the possibility of multidisciplinary group practices as far as the Practice Code Numbering System (PCNS) is concerned. Regulation 5(e) stipulates that the account or statement of a supplier must contain

“the practice code number, group practice number and individual provide registration number issued by the registering authorities for providers, if applicable, of the supplier of service and, in the case of a group practice, the name of the provider who provided the service.”



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3. The detail of the provider (PR Number) who rendered the service is still required to be stipulated on the account or statement in terms of this Regulation.
4. A Practice Code Number is awarded to a particular healthcare practice. That practice may consist of a solus provider, a group practice, a partnership, a company or any other entity that is legally authorised to render health care services to patients.
5. BHF has been allocating group practice numbers for some time. Now, the only difference is that groups may include various types of providers based on the new Ethical Rules. Providers have multiple options to set up a multidisciplinary group practice, and they need to determine the most suitable approach for their requirements.
6. The Practice Code Number is a unique identifier that assists in ensuring payment of the correct provider, and the correct payment of the provider, in accordance with legal requirements including but not limited to their scope of practice.
7. It also facilitates the accurate identification of providers prevents medical schemes from paying unregistered providers as mandated by law. Since payments by medical schemes are largely automated and facilitated through the use of advanced technology systems, the PCNS plays an important role in reducing payment errors by schemes. As a result improves the speed and efficiency with which health care providers are paid.
8. The PCNS does not aim to “police” the Ethical Rules of the HPCSA however, as part of its function to assist in the prevention and elimination of fraud, waste and abuse, each application for a practice code number will be given the usual careful consideration.



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9. The following ethical rules still apply -

- A practitioner may now share, charge or receive fees from another practitioner: provided there is an express agreement, arrangement or model of rendering multidisciplinary health care services which is appropriately structured and which serves to contain costs of rendering health-care services and to enhance access to appropriate healthcare.
- Charging or receiving fees for services not personally rendered is still prohibited where a multidisciplinary group practice has not been expressly established. Exceptions are for locums and other practitioners in the employment of that practitioner.
- An amendment to Ethical Rule 8 now allows a practitioner to provide healthcare services with other registered practitioners, persons registered in terms of the Health Professions Act or other legislation regulating the health professions: provided that these persons are all participants in a formally established multidisciplinary practice in some capacity of another.
- It is therefore still an overarching legal requirement that all health professionals involved are duly registered in terms of applicable law. It is already possible, in terms of section 54A of the Health Professions Act, for the Minister of Health in consultation with the HPCSA to exempt any juristic person or class of juristic persons to enable such person to practice a profession.
- A new Ethical Rule 8A allows a practitioner to share rooms with a person registered in terms of the Health Professions Act or in terms of any other legislation regulating health professions.



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- Subrule 1 of Rule 18 has been changed to allow a practitioner to accept a professional appointment or employment from employers provided that the practitioner ensures that the employment contract has as its primary aim “the enhancement of the quality of health-care services to patients, is structured to contain costs, enhance access to appropriate high-quality health-care services or products to patients and is not designed to extract profit for the benefit of the practitioner or their employer to the detriment of patients”.
 - There is no obligation on a practitioner to enter into an employment contract. This Rule does not detract from the legal requirement that the employed practitioner must be duly registered as required by law.
 - These contracts may be subjected to scrutiny by the Health Professions Council but do not require the Council's advance approval.
10. In essence the new Ethical Rules have been widened to accommodate the possibility of multidisciplinary group practices but that doesn't mean that the other Ethical Rules now fall by the wayside.
11. The new Ethical Rules acknowledge that a multidisciplinary group practice may be established by means of various models and so are not overly prescriptive in this regard. However, they also stress that there must be an explicit, properly structured and established multidisciplinary arrangement that is not detrimental to the patient. Health care providers will not be allowed to simply call themselves a multidisciplinary practice in order to avoid compliance with the Ethical Rules as a whole.
12. BHF will start processing applications and allocating multidisciplinary group practice numbers in keeping with the new Ethical Rules from 01 May 2024



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In order to allow the Funders adequate time to make the necessary changes to their administration systems for claims processing purposes, **the effective date will be 1 June 2024.**

PS: The new application form for the above will be available for downloading on the PCNS site from **1 May 2024.**



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