A code of conduct for sports physiotherapists in New Zealand

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The practice of sports physiotherapy occurs in an ethically interesting space. Pressures can arise from coaches, athletes, sponsors and others that make the practice of sports physiotherapy a complex challenge to good clinical practice and professional standards. A hidden narrative often experienced by health care workers in sport is to either comply with requests or risk their future employment. The highly publicised UK case (coined Bloodgate) demonstrates that even very highly regarded sports physiotherapists and doctors can be caught in difficult situations. The Bloodgate case illustrates that sports health care workers need ethical guidance and support for their work over and above that offered for other clinical areas. In 2014, The New Zealand Sports Physiotherapy special interest group has developed a code of conduct to guide physiotherapists working in sport. This document does not supplant or conflict with the Aotearoa New Zealand Physiotherapy Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, but supplements and explains it within a sporting context. The Sports Physiotherapy Code of Conduct establishes standards for clinical practice that are visible to clinicians and the public, shields practitioners from unscrupulous demands, and to help construct a professional community. This paper describes the process of development of the sports physiotherapy code of conduct in NZ, and informs members of the expectations laid out within the new document.