

## Ethical Use of Quarantine & Isolation

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### Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 8.4

Although physicians' primary ethical obligation is to their individual patients, they also have a long-recognized public health responsibility. In the context of infectious disease, this may include the use of quarantine and isolation to reduce the transmission of disease and protect the health of the public. In such situations, physicians have a further responsibility to protect their own health to ensure that they remain able to provide care. These responsibilities potentially conflict with patients' rights of self-determination and with physicians' duty to advocate for the best interests of individual patients and to provide care in emergencies.

With respect to the use of quarantine and isolation as public health interventions in situations of epidemic disease, individual physicians should:

- (a) Participate in implementing scientifically and ethically sound quarantine and isolation measures in keeping with the duty to provide care in epidemics.
- (b) Educate patients and the public about the nature of the public health threat, potential harm to others, and benefits of quarantine and isolation.
- (c) Encourage patients to adhere voluntarily to quarantine and isolation.
- (d) Support mandatory quarantine and isolation when a patient fails to adhere voluntarily.
- (e) Inform patients about and comply with mandatory public health reporting requirements.
- (f) Take appropriate protective and preventive measures to minimize transmission of infectious disease from physician to patient, including accepting immunization for vaccine-preventable disease, in keeping with ethics guidance.
- (g) Seek medical evaluation and treatment if they suspect themselves to be infected, including adhering to mandated public health measures.

The medical profession, in collaboration with public health colleagues and civil authorities, has an ethical responsibility to:

(h) Ensure that quarantine measures are ethically and scientifically sound:

1. Use the least restrictive means available to control disease in the community while protecting individual rights
2. Without bias against any class or category of patients

(i) Advocate for the highest possible level of confidentiality when personal health information is transmitted in the context of public health reporting.

(j) Advocate for access to public health services to ensure timely detection of risks and implementation of public health interventions, including quarantine and isolation.

(k) Advocate for protective and preventive measures for physicians and others caring for patients with communicable disease.

(l) Develop educational materials and programs about quarantine and isolation as public health interventions for patients and the public.

*AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, III, VI, VII, VIII*

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