

Patient-Physician Relationships

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 1.1.1

The practice of medicine, and its embodiment in the clinical encounter between a patient and a physician, is fundamentally a moral activity that arises from the imperative to care for patients and to alleviate suffering. The relationship between a patient and a physician is based on trust, which gives rise to physicians' ethical responsibility to place patients' welfare above the physician's own self-interest or obligations to others, to use sound medical judgment on patients' behalf, and to advocate for their patients' welfare.

A patient-physician relationship exists when a physician serves a patient's medical needs. Generally, the relationship is entered into by mutual consent between physician and patient (or surrogate).

However, in certain circumstances a limited patient-physician relationship may be created without the patient's (or surrogate's) explicit agreement. Such circumstances include:

1. ()When a physician provides emergency care or provides care at the request of the patient's treating physician. In these circumstances, the patient's (or surrogate's) agreement to the relationship is implicit.
2. ()When a physician provides medically appropriate care for a prisoner under court order, in keeping with ethics guidance on court-initiated treatment.
3. ()When a physician examines a patient in the context of an independent medical examination, in keeping with ethics guidance. In such situations, a limited patient-physician relationship exists.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, II, IV, VIII

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