Disruptive Behavior by Patients

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 1.2.2

The relationship between patients and physicians is based on trust and should serve to promote patients’ well-being while respecting their dignity and rights.

Disrespectful or derogatory language or conduct on the part of either physicians or patients can undermine trust and compromise the integrity of the patient-physician relationship. It can make members of targeted groups reluctant to seek care, and create an environment that strains relationships among patients, physicians, and the health care team.

Trust can be established and maintained only when there is mutual respect. Therefore, in their interactions with patients, physicians should:

1. (‘) Recognize that derogatory or disrespectful language or conduct can cause psychological harm to those they target.
2. (‘) Always treat their patients with compassion and respect.
3. (‘) Terminate the patient-physician relationship with a patient who uses derogatory language or acts in a prejudicial manner only if the patient will not modify the conduct. In such cases, the physician should arrange to transfer the patient’s care.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, II, VI, IX

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Code of Medical Ethics: Patient-Physician Relationships

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