

Consultation, Referral & Second Opinions

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 1.2.3

Physicians' fiduciary obligation to promote patients' best interests and welfare can include consulting other physicians for advice in the care of the patient or referring patients to other professionals to provide care.

When physicians seek or provide consultation about a patient's care or refer a patient for health care services, including diagnostic laboratory services, they should:

1. () Base the decision or recommendation on the patient's medical needs, as they would for any treatment recommendation, and consult or refer the patient to only health care professionals who have appropriate knowledge and skills and are licensed to provide the services needed.
2. () Share patients' health information in keeping with ethics guidance on confidentiality.
3. () Assure the patient that he or she may seek a second opinion or choose someone else to provide a recommended consultation or service. Physicians should urge patients to familiarize themselves with any restrictions associated with their individual health plan that may bear on their decision, such as additional out-of-pocket costs to the patient for referrals or care outside a designated panel of providers.
4. () Explain the rationale for the consultation, opinion, or findings and recommendations clearly to the patient.
5. () Respect the terms of any contractual relationships they may have with health care organizations or payers that affect referrals and consultation.

Physicians may not terminate a patient-physician relationship solely because the patient seeks recommendations or care from a health care professional whom the physician has not recommended.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: IV, V, VI

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Code of Medical Ethics: Patient-Physician Relationships

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