

Political Communications

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 2.3.4

Physicians enjoy the rights and privileges of free speech shared by all Americans. It is laudable for physicians to run for political office; to lobby for political positions, parties, or candidates; and in every other way to exercise the full scope of their political rights as citizens. Physicians may exercise these rights individually or through involvement with professional societies and political action committees or other organizations.

When physicians wish to express their personal political views to a patient or a patient's family, the physician must be sensitive to the imbalance of power in the patient-physician relationship, as well as to the patient's vulnerability and desire for privacy. Physicians should refrain from initiating political conversations during the clinical encounter.

Physicians must not allow differences with the patient or family about political matters to interfere with the delivery of professional care.

When expressing political views to a patient or a patient's family, physicians should:

1. () Judge both the intrusiveness of the discussion and the patient's level of comfort before initiating such a discussion.
2. () Discuss political matters only in contexts where conversation with the patient or family about social, civic, or recreational matters is acceptable.
3. () Refrain from conversation about political matters when the patient or family is emotionally pressured by significant medical circumstances.
4. () Work toward and advocate for the reform and proper administration of laws related to health care. Physicians should stay well informed of current political questions regarding needed and proposed reforms.
5. () Stay well informed about needed or proposed policies concerning health care access and quality, medical research, and promoting public health so as to be able to advocate for patients' needs.

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