

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON ETHICAL AND JUDICIAL AFFAIRS

CEJA Report 3-I-13

Subject: Modernizing the *Code of Medical Ethics*

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1 At the end of 2008, the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs (CEJA) launched a multi-year project to
2 critically review and update the *Code of Medical Ethics*. This project represents the most thoroughgoing
3 effort to update the *Code* since 1957. The intent now, as then, is to ensure that the *Code* remains the pre-
4 eminent expression of the ethical standards of the medical profession and upholds its legacy as “a symbol
5 which may help keep ideals uppermost in mind and practice.”¹
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7 The work is now entering its final stage. This report briefly reviews the project and proposes a plan for
8 presenting the completed work product to the House of Delegates for review and deliberation.
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10 BACKGROUND

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12 The *Code of Medical Ethics* embodies the accumulated wisdom of the HOD and CEJA’s goal has been to
13 preserve that wisdom and to carry out its work through a transparent process.² The project involves three
14 key stages. The first stage focused on reviewing all current Opinions for relevance/timeliness of guidance,
15 clarity, and consistency of guidance on related topics, undertaken in collaboration with the Federation of
16 Medicine. Response from across the Federation to CEJA’s invitation for input informed CEJA’s review.
17 As part of the initial review process CEJA re-organized Opinions into a new, more intuitive chapter
18 structure, which the council has continued to refine as the work has progressed.
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20 In the second stage, working groups within CEJA developed drafts of updated Opinions on a chapter-by-
21 chapter basis, which the council as a whole then reviewed and refined. In the process, CEJA re-organized
22 individual Opinions to conform to a uniform format to ensure that guidance is clear and easy to follow.
23 CEJA has been conservative in suggesting substantive change, doing so only where needed to ensure that
24 guidance remains relevant in the face of changes in biomedical science and conditions of medical
25 practice. The Council on Constitution and Bylaws has contributed to this second stage of the project by
26 reviewing draft updated Opinions to confirm whether individual drafts contain only editorial changes that
27 preserve the intent and substance of the original Opinion.
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29 In the third stage of the project, CEJA will share its work product with the HOD.
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31 SHARING CEJA’S WORK PRODUCT

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33 The process of critically reviewing and reorganizing the content of the *Code* has reinforced for CEJA the
34 importance of seeing the *Code* as an inter-related whole. Although each Opinion targets specific kinds of
35 contexts or situations and thus can be read separately to provide immediate, practical guidance, no single

¹ Principles of medical ethics. [JAMA. 1957;164\(13\):1482.](#)

² The Council has updated the House over the course of the project in several informational reports ([CEJA 5-I-08](#),
[CEJA 4-I-09](#), [CEJA 9-I-10](#)) and an Open Forum session at the AMA’s 2011 Interim meeting.

1 Opinion stands fully independent of the *Code* as a whole and the fundamental professional values that
2 undergird it. Moreover, questions about individual updated Opinions will often implicate guidance
3 elsewhere in the *Code* and cannot necessarily be answered without referring to guidance in other chapters.
4 For these reasons, CEJA believes it is crucial that the updated *Code* be presented as a single, integrated
5 work for purposes of review and discussion.
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7 Further, given the volume of material to be digested, presenting the material as an integrated whole can
8 best help maintain consistency across the finished product, which would be considerably more difficult to
9 ensure under an iterative, chapter-by-chapter review.
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11 To facilitate review and discussion of the updated *Code of Medical Ethics*, the Council on Ethical and
12 Judicial Affairs will:
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- 14 1. Post a brief document to CEJA’s online forum explaining key aspects of how CEJA has updated
15 the Opinions in the chapter, accompanied by a detailed “crosswalk” between each original
16 Opinion (or Opinions) and the corresponding updated Opinion. The CEJA forum is open to all
17 members of the AMA: www.ama-assn.org/go/cejaforum (member login is required to access the
18 site).
19
- 20 2. Review feedback received through the online forum to revise the draft updated *Code* and present
21 a revised draft of the work as a whole at the earliest feasible meeting of the House of Delegates.