Subject: Update: Modernizing the AMA Code of Medical Ethics

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As noted in CEJA Report 5-I-08, "Modernizing the AMA Code of Medical Ethics," the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs (CEJA) has embarked on a project to critically review and update the Code. The goal is to ensure that the Code continues to provide timely, relevant, cogent guidance for the profession of medicine and its individual physician and medical student members.

Staff and consultants completed a preliminary review of all Opinions in the Code as re-organized under the new, more intuitive taxonomy identified in CEJA’s previous report. Each Opinion was scored with respect to the continued importance of the topic the Opinion addresses; the quality of ethical analysis; and the quality, timeliness, and usefulness of the specific ethical guidance the Opinion offers. This first round of review also sought to identify topic gaps that should be addressed in new CEJA reports and recommendations; opportunities to combine two or more existing Opinions on related issues into an overarching report and recommendations; and opinions that are outdated and should be replaced (or, where appropriate, sunsetted).

The Council is currently reviewing initial proposals from staff and consultants for refining how the Opinions of the Code are organized within each topical chapter. The first round of review suggested that bringing together “clusters” of Opinions on closely related concerns within a general topic area would enhance the value of the Code not only for the practicing physicians who are its primary audience, but also for medical educators and others. For example, bringing together Opinions in clusters on confidentiality, privacy, and medical records within an overall chapter on privacy and confidentiality would help make it easy to find guidance about physicians’ responsibilities with respect to particular questions while also indicating the broader range of relevant ethical issues.

The Council is also considering the potential value for users of presenting the content of the Code in a uniform format across all Opinions. As the Code has evolved to meet new challenges in medical science and the delivery of health care, Opinions have been presented in a variety of formats. This can present a challenge for interpreting the ethical guidance provided in different Opinions. One proposal under discussion is to present the substantive content of all Opinions in a three-part form: a “preamble” that identifies the fundamental ethical and professional values and

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obligations at issue; a brief description of the context of the ethical concern(s) the Opinion
addresses; and finally, concrete, practical guidelines for physicians’ professional ethical conduct.

Building on these foundations, in the coming months the Council will work with staff and
consultants to begin developing specific proposals for revision of each chapter in a systematic,
iterative process. As this process goes forward, CEJA will solicit additional review and feedback
from stakeholders, including representatives from AMA Councils, Sections, Special Groups,
members, and the Federation.