

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

1.2.8 Gifts from Patients

Patients offer gifts to a physician for many reasons. Some gifts are offered as an expression of gratitude or a reflection of the patient's cultural tradition. Accepting gifts offered for these reasons can enhance the patient-physician relationship.

Other gifts may signal psychological needs that require the physician's attention. Some patients may offer gifts or cash to secure or influence care or to secure preferential treatment. Such gifts can undermine physicians' obligation to provide services fairly to all patients; accepting them is likely to damage the patient-physician relationship.

The interaction of these factors is complex and physicians should consider them sensitively before accepting or declining a gift.

Physicians to whom a patient offers a gift should:

- (a) Be sensitive to the gift's value relative to the patient's or physician's means. Physicians should decline gifts that are disproportionately or inappropriately large, or when the physician would be uncomfortable to have colleagues know the gift had been accepted.
- (b) Not allow the gift or offer of a gift to influence the patient's medical care.
- (c) Decline a bequest from a patient if the physician has reason to believe accepting the gift would present an emotional or financial hardship to the patient's family.
- (d) Physicians may wish to suggest that the patient or family make a charitable contribution in lieu of the bequest, in keeping with ethics guidance.

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