

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

10.3 Peers as Patients

The opportunity to care for a fellow physician is a privilege or physician-in-training and may represent a gratifying experience and serve as a show of respect or competence. However, physicians must recognize that providing medical care for a fellow professional can pose special challenges for objectivity, open exchange of information, privacy and confidentiality, and informed consent.

In emergencies or isolated rural settings when options for care by other physicians are limited or where there is no other qualified physician available, physicians should not hesitate to treat colleagues.

Physicians must make the same fundamental ethical commitments when treating peers as when treating any other patient. Physicians who provide medical care to a colleague should:

- (a) Exercise objective professional judgment and make unbiased treatment recommendations despite the personal or professional relationship they may have with the patient.
- (b) Be sensitive to the potential psychological discomfort of the physician-patient, especially when eliciting sensitive information or conducting an intimate examination.
- (c) Respect the physical and informational privacy of physician-patients. Discuss how to respond to inquiries about the physician-patient's medical care from colleagues. Recognize that special measures may be needed to ensure privacy.
- (d) Provide information to enable the physician-patient to make voluntary, well-informed decisions about care. The treating physician should not assume that the physician-patient is knowledgeable about his or her medical condition.

Physicians-in-training and medical students (when they provide care as part of their supervised training) face unique challenges when asked to provide or participate in care for peers, given the circumstances of their roles in residency programs and medical schools. Except in emergency situations or when other care is not available, physicians-in-training should not be required to provide medical care for fellow trainees, faculty members, or attending physicians if they are reluctant to do so.

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