

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

11.2.6 – Mergers of Secular & Religiously Affiliated Health Care Institutions

The merger of secular health care institutions and those affiliated with a faith tradition can benefit patients and communities by sustaining the ability to provide a continuum of care locally in the face of financial and other pressures. Yet consolidation among health care institutions with diverging value commitments and missions may also result in limiting what services are available. Consolidation can be a source of tension for the physicians and other health care professionals who are employed by or affiliated with the consolidated health care entity.

Protecting the community that the institution serves as well as the integrity of the institution, the physicians and other professionals who practice in association with it, is an essential, but challenging responsibility.

Physician-leaders within institutions that have or are contemplating a merger of secular and faith-based institutions should:

- (a) Seek input from stakeholders to inform decisions to help ensure that after a consolidation the same breadth of services and care previously offered will continue to be available to the community.
- (b) Be transparent about the values and mission that will guide the consolidated entity and proactively communicate to stakeholders, including prospective patients, physicians, staff, and civic leaders, how this will affect patient care and access to services.
- (c) Negotiate contractual issues of governance, management, financing, and personnel that will respect the diversity of values within the community and at minimum that the same breadth of services and care remain available to the community.
- (d) Recognize that physicians' primary obligation is to their patients. Physician-leaders in consolidated health systems should provide avenues for meaningful appeal and advocacy to enable associated physicians to respond to the unique needs of individual patients.
- (e) Establish mechanisms to monitor the effect of new institutional arrangements on patient care and well-being and the opportunity of participating clinicians to uphold professional norms, both to identify and address adverse consequences and to identify and disseminate positive outcomes.

Individual physicians associated with secular and faith-based institutions that have or propose to consolidate should:

- (f) Work to hold leaders accountable to meeting conditions for professionalism within the institution.

- (g) Advocate for solutions when there is ongoing disagreement about services or arrangements for care.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: VII, VIII, IX