AMA *Code of Medical Ethics*

10.8 Collaborative Care

In health care, teams that collaborate effectively can enhance the quality of care for individual patients. By being prudent stewards and delivering care efficiently, teams also have the potential to expand access to care for populations of patients. Such teams are defined by their dedication to providing patient-centered care, protecting the integrity of the patient-physician relationship, sharing mutual respect and trust, communicating effectively, sharing accountability and responsibility, and upholding common ethical values as team members.

Health care teams often include members of multiple health professions, including physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, physical therapists, and care managers among others. To foster the trust essential to healing relationships between patients and physicians or nonphysician practitioners, all members of the team should be candid about their professional credentials, their experience, and the role they will play in the patient's care.

An effective team requires the vision and direction of an effective leader. In medicine, this means having a clinical leader who will ensure that the team as a whole functions effectively and facilitates decision-making. Physicians are uniquely situated to serve as clinical leaders. By virtue of their thorough and diverse training, experience, and knowledge, physicians have a distinctive appreciation of the breadth of health issues and treatments that enables them to synthesize the diverse professional perspectives and recommendations of the team into an appropriate, coherent plan of care for the patient.

As clinical leaders within health care teams, physicians individually should:

(a) Model ethical leadership by:

   (i) understanding the range of their own and other team members' skills and expertise and roles in the patient's care;

   (ii) clearly articulating individual responsibilities and accountability;

   (iii) encouraging insights from other members and being open to adopting them;

   (iv) mastering broad teamwork skills.

(b) Promote core team values of honesty, discipline, creativity, humility, and curiosity and commitment to continuous improvement.

(c) Help clarify expectations to support systematic, transparent decision making.

(d) Encourage open discussion of ethical and clinical concerns and foster a team culture in which each member's opinion is heard and considered and team members share accountability for decisions and outcomes.

(e) Communicate appropriately with the patient and family, respecting the unique relationship of patient and family as members of the team.

(f) Assure that all team members are describing their profession and role

As leaders within health care institutions, physicians individually and collectively should:

(g) Advocate for the resources and support health care teams need to collaborate effectively in providing high-quality care for the patients they serve, including education about the principles of effective teamwork and training to build teamwork skills.

(h) Encourage their institutions to identify and constructively address barriers to effective collaboration.

(i) Promote the development and use of institutional policies and procedures, such as an institutional ethics committee or similar resource, to address constructively conflicts within teams that adversely affect patient care.

(j) Promote a culture of respect, collegiality and transparency among all health care personnel.

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