

## ***AMA Code of Medical Ethics***

### ***8.11 Health Promotion and Preventive Care***

Medicine and public health share an ethical foundation stemming from the essential and direct role that health plays in human flourishing. While a physician's role tends to focus on diagnosing and treating illness once it occurs, physicians also have a professional commitment to prevent disease and promote health and well-being for their patients and the community.

The clinical encounter provides an opportunity for the physician to engage the patient in the process of health promotion. Effective elements of this process may include educating and motivating patients regarding healthy lifestyle, helping patients by assessing their needs, preferences, and readiness for change and recommending appropriate preventive care measures. Implementing effective health promotion practices is consistent with physicians' duties to patients and also with their responsibilities as stewards of health care resources.

While primary care physicians are typically the patient's main source for health promotion and disease prevention, specialists can play an important role, particularly when the specialist has a close or long-standing relationship with the patient or when recommended action is particularly relevant for the condition that the specialist is treating. Additionally, while all physicians must balance a commitment to individual patients with the health of the public, physicians who work solely or primarily in a public health capacity should uphold accepted standards of medical professionalism by implementing policies that appropriately balance individual liberties with the social goals of public health policies.

Health promotion should be a collaborative, patient-centered process that promotes trust and recognizes patients' self-directed roles and responsibilities in maintaining health. In keeping with their professional commitment to the health of patients and the public, physicians should:

- (a) Keep current with preventive care guidelines that apply to their patients and ensure that the interventions they recommend are well supported by the best available evidence.
- (b) Educate patients about relevant modifiable risk factors.
- (c) Recommend and encourage patients to have appropriate vaccinations and screenings.
- (d) Encourage an open dialogue regarding circumstances that may make it difficult to manage chronic conditions or maintain a healthy lifestyle, such as transportation, work and home environments, and social support systems.
- (e) Collaborate with the patient to develop recommendations that are most likely to be effective.
- (f) When appropriate, delegate health promotion activities to other professionals or other resources available in the community who can help counsel and educate patients.
- (g) Consider the health of the community when treating their own patients and identify and notify public health authorities if and when they notice patterns in patient health that may indicate a health risk for others.
- (h) Recognize that modeling health behaviors can help patients make changes in their own lives.

Collectively, physicians should:

- (i) Promote training in health promotion and disease prevention during medical school, residency and in continuing medical education.
- (j) Advocate for healthier schools, workplaces and communities.
- (k) Create or promote healthier work and training environments for physicians.
- (l) Advocate for community resources designed to promote health and provide access to preventive services.
- (m) Support research to improve the evidence for disease prevention and health promotion.

*AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: V,VII*