

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

8.12 Ethical Physician Conduct in the Media

Physicians who participate in the media can offer effective and accessible medical perspectives leading to a healthier and better informed society. However, ethical challenges present themselves when the worlds of medicine, journalism, and entertainment intersect. In the context of the media marketplace, understanding the role as a physician being distinct from a journalist, commentator, or media personality is imperative.

Physicians involved in the media environment should be aware of their ethical obligations to patients, the public, and the medical profession; and that their conduct can affect their medical colleagues, other health care professionals, as well as institutions with which they are affiliated. They should also recognize that members of the audience might not understand the unidirectional nature of the relationship and might think of themselves as patients. Physicians should:

- (a) Always remember that they are physicians first and foremost, and must uphold the values, norms, and integrity of the medical profession.
- (b) Encourage audience members to seek out qualified physicians to address the unique questions and concerns they have about their respective care when providing general medical advice.
- (c) Be aware of how their medical training, qualifications, experience, and advice are being used by media forums and how this information is being communicated to the viewing public.
- (d) Understand that as physicians, they will be taken as authorities when they engage with the media and therefore should ensure that the medical information they provide is:
 - (i) accurate;
 - (ii) inclusive of known risks and benefits;
 - (iii) commensurate with their medical expertise;
 - (iv) based on valid scientific evidence and insight gained from professional experience.
- (e) Confine their medical advice to their area(s) of expertise, and should clearly distinguish the limits of their medical knowledge where appropriate.
- (f) Refrain from making clinical diagnoses about individuals (e.g., public officials, celebrities, persons in the news) they have not had the opportunity to personally examine.
- (g) Protect patient privacy and confidentiality by refraining from the discussion of identifiable information, unless given specific permission by the patient to do so.
- (h) Fully disclose any conflicts of interest and avoid situations that may lead to potential conflicts.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: II,V,VII