

ARCHIVED: WMA STATEMENT ON PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR STANDARDS OF MEDICAL CARE

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and editorially revised by the 174th WMA Council Session, Pilanesberg, South Africa, October 2006
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Recognising that:

1. The physician has an obligation to provide his or her patients with competent medical service and to report to the appropriate authorities those physicians who practice unethically and incompetently or who engage in fraud or deception (International Code of Medical Ethics); and
2. The physician should be free to make clinical and ethical judgements without inappropriate outside interference; and
3. Ethics committees, credentials committees and other forms of peer review have been long established, recognised and accepted by organised medicine to scrutinise physicians' professional conduct and, where appropriate, impose reasonable restrictions on the absolute professional freedom of physicians; and

Reaffirming that:

1. Professional autonomy and the duty to engage in vigilant self-regulation are essential requirements for high quality care and therefore are patient benefits that must be preserved;
2. And, as a corollary, the medical profession has a continuing responsibility to support, participate in, and accept appropriate peer review activity that is conducted in good faith;

POSITION

1. A physician's professional service should be considered distinct from commercial goods and services, not least because a physician is bound by specific ethical duties, which include the dedication to provide competent medical practice (International Code of Medical Ethics).
2. Whatever judicial or regulatory process a country has established, any judgement on a physician's professional conduct or performance must incorporate evaluation by the physician's professional peers who, by their training and experience, understand the complexity of the medical issues involved.
3. Any procedure for considering complaints from patients which fails to be based upon good faith evaluation of the physician's actions or omissions by the physician's peers is unacceptable. Such a procedure would undermine the overall quality of medical care provided to all patients.