

ARCHIVED: WMA STATEMENT ON THE PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF PHYSICIANS IN TREATING AIDS PATIENTS

*Adopted by the 40th World Medical Assembly Vienna, Austria, September 1988
and rescinded at the WMA General Assembly, Pilanesberg, South Africa, 2006*

The World Medical Association, Inc. has previously adopted guidelines to assist National Medical Associations in developing strategies to cope with a growing AIDS epidemic. This statement provides the individual physician with direction as to his or her professional responsibilities with reference to the treatment of AIDS patients, and also as to the physician's responsibility to his or her patients in the event the physician is seropositive.

The WMA Interim Statement on AIDS, adopted in October 1987, states in part:

"Patients with AIDS and those who test positively for the antibody to the AIDS virus must be provided with appropriate medical care and should not be treated unfairly or suffer from arbitrary or irrational discrimination in their daily lives. Physicians have a long and honored tradition of tending to patients afflicted with infectious diseases with compassion and courage. That tradition must be continued throughout the AIDS epidemic."

AIDS patients are entitled to competent medical care with compassion and respect for human dignity. A physician may not ethically refuse to treat a patient whose condition is within the physician's current realm of competence, solely because the patient is seropositive. Medical ethics do not permit categorical discrimination against a patient based solely on his or her seropositivity. A person who is afflicted with AIDS needs competent, compassionate treatment. A physician who is not able to provide the care and services required by persons with AIDS should make an appropriate referral to those physicians or facilities that are equipped to provide such services. Until the referral can be accomplished, the physician must care for the patient to the best of his or her ability.

The rights and interests of those who are infected with the AIDS virus, as well as those who are not, are entitled to protection. A physician who knows that he or she has an infectious disease should not engage in any activity that creates a risk of transmission of the disease to others. In the context of possible exposure to AIDS, the activity in which the physician wishes to engage will be the controlling factor.

In the provision of medical care, if a risk of transmission of an infectious disease from a physician to a patient exists, disclosure of that risk to patients is not enough; patients are entitled to expect that their physicians will not increase their exposure to the risk of contracting an infectious disease.

If no risk exists, disclosure of the physician's medical condition to his or her patients will serve no rational purpose; if a risk does exist, the physician should not engage in that activity.

If a patient is fully informed of the physician's condition and the risks that condition presents, and the patient elects to continue care and treatment with the seropositive physician, great care must be exercised to assure that true informed consent is obtained.

The duty of all physicians is to refrain from issuing false certificates even if the intention of such is to help the patients to stay within his regular environment.

The duty of the physician is to comply with and make comply the sanitary and protective rules established for health personnel because they are known, simple and effective.

The duty of all physicians is to participate fully in preventive programs initiated by public authorities to stop the spread of AIDS.