

An Orthopedic Surgeon's Guide to Ethics and Professionalism

I Definitions

The American Heritage Dictionary defines ethics as the rules and/or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession. A profession, described as an occupation requiring training and specialized study, embodies certain qualifications above and beyond the ordinary.

Professionalism, therefore, is the dedicated practice of those qualifications, which has evolved from rules of proper conduct determined by members of a profession.

Medical Ethics, then, is the unique set of standards that governs the medical profession, and, by extension, surgical practice.

Members of the medical profession, according to the AMA, must be accountable, first and foremost, to their patients, and then to society, other health professionals, and self.

II The AMA's Principles of Medical Ethics state:

- A. ***A physician shall*** be dedicated to providing competent medical care with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.
- B. ***A physician shall*** uphold the standards of professionalism be honest in all professional interactions, and strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence, or those engaging in fraud and deception to the appropriate entities.

- C. *A physician shall* respect the law and also recognize : responsibility to seek changes in those requirements, which are contrary to the best interests of the patient.
- D. *A physician shall* respect the rights of patients, colleague and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences and privacy within the constraints of the law.
- E. *A physician shall* continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge, maintain a commitment to medical education, make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and the public, obtain consultation, and use the talents of other health professionals when indicated.
- F. A physician shall, while caring for a patient, regard his / her responsibility to the patient as paramount.

III Origins of Ethical Standards

- A. Through the years, ethical standards, taking into account **patient welfare** and societal changes, are created and modified, as determined by the intellectual, philosophical, and moral constraints of a people, or by the leadership of a **profession**.
- B. What makes a surgeon "**qualified**"? Strictly speaking, a Board-certified surgeon, by passing a standardized examination, has demonstrated that he or she is qualified.
- C. Additional requirements, as formulated by ethical practice, include:
 - 1. Competency, as demonstrated by the practice of orthopedic surgery based upon current knowledge.
 - 2. Patient care and patient welfare the predominant themes.
 - 3. Communication with other physicians, surgeons, and support staff, via conferences, peer reviewed materials,

discussions, etc

IV Important Traits in an Orthopedic Surgeon

Becoming a good orthopedic surgeon is a lifelong commitment. Beyond residency and into practice, an orthopedic surgeon must continue to accumulate knowledge, experience, and understanding. He or she must strive for improvement and perfection.

V Ethics in the Operating Room

Proper ethical behavior in the operating room is nurtured by:

- A. Organizing the OR (theater) into a safe and efficacious place for patients, colleagues, residents/fellows, and support staff.
- B. Utilizing OR (theater) time in a **cost-effective** manner.
- C. Embracing the team concept (surgeons, nurses, techs, physician assistants, residents, etc.).
- D. Knowing when to ask for help when in trouble or in uncharted territory. We all make mistakes; seeking help is the right thing to do. Remember that the most important (and silent) person in the OR (theater) is the patient.
- E. Creating a stable and positive working environment.
- F. Ensuring open, honest communication among all team members.

VI Ethical Dilemmas:

- A. Resident training:
Based on technical ability, the resident/fellow is trained accept graduated responsibility for patient care, in

- accordance with standards of professional care. under direct supervision of an attending physician.
- B. How to deal with wrong-site surgery.
 - C. Penetration injury to a team member.
 - D. Unexpected complications
 - 1. Fractures
 - 2. Neurovascular injuries
 - 3. Wrong implant
 - 4. Cardiac arrest
 - E. Inappropriate behavior, of team members
 - 1. Poor comportment (inappropriate comments, actions, etc;
 - 2. Abusive language
 - 3. Temper tantrums
 - 4. Personal phone calls (nurses, other team members)
 - F. **When things go wrong, ask for help!** Mobilize your resources (team members, materials, etc)! Don't lose your cool! After an acute situation has been resolved, discuss the problem openly and honestly with the patient's family in a proper and pleasant environment.

VII Summary

In the OR (theater), a competent orthopedic surgeon:

- A. Applies maximum effort
- B. Has good to excellent technical skills
- C. Has a good to excellent fund of medical knowledge
- D. Pays attention to details
- E. Does not "know it all"
- R Has good communication skills
- G. Is pleasant and polite to peers
- H. Directs all his efforts to improving quality of patient care.

VIII Pertinent Questions With No Clear-cut Answers

Are we teaching our residents/fellows properly?

- A. Who should become an orthopedic surgeon?
- B. What are proper tenets of behavior with the corporate sector and industry?
- C. What role, if any, should we play in the political processes that may affect our profession?
- D. Should there be an **umbrella organization in India** (AAOS) to provide leadership and assist in making the proper choices?
- E. How can the media be used, in a fair and ethical manner, to disseminate evolving knowledge and technology?

IX Conclusion

An orthopedic surgeon must make a lifelong commitment to patient care and welfare. The proper practice of medicine, based on current knowledge, is what we must strive to achieve.

REFERENCE – THANKS TO LEAF LET FROM DR CHITRNJAN