

Declaration of Lisbon on rights of the patient

In 1981 the World Medical Association adopted a statement on the rights of the patient:

Recognising that there may be practical, ethical or legal difficulties, a patient should always act according to his/her conscience and always in the best interests of the patient. The following Declaration represents some of the principal rights which the medical profession seeks to provide to patients.

Whenever legislation or government action denies these rights of the patient, physicians should seek by appropriate means to assure or to restore them.

- (a) The patient has the right to choose his physician freely.
- (b) The patient has the right to be cared for by the physician who is free to make clinical and ethical judgements without any outside interference.
- (c) The patient has the right to accept or refuse treatment after receiving adequate information.
- (d) The patient has the right to expect that his physician will respect the confidential nature of all his medical and personal details.
- (e) The patient has the right to die in dignity.
- (f) The patient has the right to receive or decline spiritual and moral comfort including the help of a minister of appropriate religion.

Therapeutic abortion

In 1970 the World Medical Association drew up a Statement on Therapeutic Abortion. This code, known as the Declaration of Oslo, was amended by the 35th World Medical Assembly, Venice, Italy in October 1983 and states:

1. The first moral principle imposed upon the physician is respect of human life from its beginning.
2. Circumstances which bring the vital interests of a mother into conflict with the vital interests of her unborn child create a dilemma and raise the question whether or not the pregnancy should be deliberately terminated.
3. Diversity of response to this situation results from the diversity of attitudes towards the life of the unborn child. This is a matter of individual conviction and conscience which must be respected.
4. It is not the role of the medical profession to determine the attitudes and rules of any particular state or community in this matter, but it is our duty to attempt both to ensure the protection of our patients and to safeguard the rights of the physician within society.
5. Therefore, where the law allows therapeutic abortion to be performed, the procedure should be performed by a physician competent to do so in premises approved by the appropriate authority.
6. If the physician considers that his convictions do not allow him to advise or perform an abortion, he may withdraw while ensuring the continuity of (medical) care by a competent colleague.
7. This statement, while it is endorsed by the General Assembly of the World Medical Association, is not to be regarded as binding on any individual member association unless it is adopted by that member association.

Medical secrecy

The following resolution on 'Medical secrecy' was adopted by the World Medical Association in 1973:

WHEREAS: The privacy of the individual is highly prized in most societies and widely accepted as a civil right; and

WHEREAS: The confidential nature of the patient-doctor relationship is regarded by most doctors as extremely important and is taken for granted by the patient; and

WHEREAS: There is an increasing tendency towards an intrusion on medical secrecy;

THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED that the 27th World Medical Assembly reaffirm the vital importance of maintaining medical secrecy not as a privilege for the doctor but to protect the privacy of the individual as the basis for the confidential relationship between the patient and his doctor...