POLICY 7
Application of Clinical Ethics in Medical Decision-Making

Clinical ethics refers to the principles of proper professional conduct concerning the obligations of physicians to their patients, to other health professionals in relation to their patients, and to healthcare organizations concerning the delivery of patient care. These professional obligations originate in the physician’s commitment to scientific and clinical competence and in the physician’s commitment that the protection of the protection of the patient’s health and life is the primary concern and motivation.

Beyond the traditional medical dictum of *primum non nocere*, physicians have the ethical responsibility to adhere to the following precepts that affect clinical decision making:

- All clinical decisions should be based on commonly accepted scientific principles for medical diagnosis and treatment, including but not limited to peer-reviewed scientific publications, practice parameters developed by recognized medical professional societies using well accepted methodologies, sound clinical judgment, and scientifically validated diagnostic and therapeutic tools and methods.
- All clinical decisions for an individual patient should be based on both accepted scientific principles for populations of patients with the same clinical conditions as the patient and any definably unique aspects of the patient’s clinical state that require individual treatment planning and interventions.
- All physicians have the ethical obligation to maintain a high level of clinical knowledge and skills through professionally certified programs of continuing medical education.
- All physicians have an ethical obligation, if practicing in organized systems of care, to participate actively in the organization’s structured utilization and quality programs. These programs should be scientifically based, physician led, and have as principal goals the maintenance, restoration and improvement of individual patient and population health outcomes.
- Practicing physicians have the professional responsibility to seek qualified expert opinions for the diagnosis and treatment of patients with complications that require as a medical standard of care the consultative input of such experts. These evidence-based medical consultations can be derived from direct individual communications and through referencing of qualified evidenced based medicine information sources, such as medical libraries and the Internet.
- Physicians have the ethical responsibility to involve individual patients and, where indicated by special clinical circumstances, family members or proxy decision makers, when clinical decisions regarding diagnosis and treatment are being made.
- Physicians should respect a mentally competent adult’s right of self-determination such as refusal of treatment. If a physician cannot respect that patient’s right of self-determination, then that physician should withdraw from the case with proper documented notification and assist the patient in finding another physician.
- All clinical decisions must adhere to legal and regulatory requirements for confidentiality, “duty to report”, and physician conflicts of interest.
- Physicians should not provide, prescribe, or seek compensation for medical services that they know are unnecessary.

References:

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