

**SAUDI COUNCIL  
FOR  
HEALTH SPECIALTIES**

**ETHICS  
OF  
THE MEDICAL PROFESSIN**



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**In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful**

## **Ethics of the Medical Profession**

### **Introduction:**

Praise be to Allah - the Lord of the universe. Peace and Blessing of Allah upon the nation's Prophet Mohammad son of Abdullah, and upon all of his family members and companions.

The medical profession, so to speak, has been characterized since the dawn of history by the tremendous responsibilities its practitioners have to shoulder; as this profession requires extensive knowledge, proper moral, performance dedication, self-denial, and mercy towards all people without discrimination.

Medical ethics draw their essence from Islamic teachings which call for honesty, sound performance, and God watching in every act. It also accommodates what is commonly recognized as noble characteristics and up-held traditions evolved in the local heritage and imparted from other cultures and not contradicting the canonical law of Islam.

The regulations governing the practice of the medical profession, and dentistry profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stipulate that the physician must practise his profession for the benefit of the individual and the community within the framework of respecting man's right to live, his safety and dignity; and must observe in his practice the upheld customs and traditions in the Kingdom.

The physician has certain obligations towards his community, patients and colleagues.

### **The Nobility of the Medical Profession**

Islam has made the preservation and welfare of a human being in the second place after the preservation of religion; it

forbids killing except by rights; it adjudges reprisal; and it prohibits attempts on others' life. The Almighty says: "..... And if anyone saves a life, it (his act) would be as though he has saved the life of all people."

As the medical profession touches on the human soul, man's health and life, in order to protect it against what may render it impaired or extinct, and as it endeavors to safeguard the human mind against what may render it incompetent and ruined; therefore, it has become one of the noblest and most honourable profession. Al-Sahfie, a renowned moslem scholar, said "people cannot dispense with two groups of individuals: the scholars for their (the people's) religion, and the physicians for their (the people's) bodies."

Since the physician is committed to the task of preserving the human life, then he is already possessing a matchless honour and an incomparable standing. If this is his role and this is his standing; he must maintain a typical ethical performance that distinguishes him as a practitioner of one of the most respected and honoured profession.

### **Physician's Personal Qualities**

#### **First: Sincerity:**

The physician is usually confided by patient, his family and relatives, and by the community at large. This confidence in him requires that he should be sincere to them in his treatment and counselling. He should, above all, seek to please Allah for what he is doing yet another earned honour.

#### **Second: Honesty:**

The physician is entrusted with the souls and the privacy of others. A trust he should hold and keep it properly. In describing the believers, Allah the Almighty said [they are] "those who faithfully observe their trusts and their conventions". Keeping patients' confidential information undisclosed is a sign of honesty.

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**Not disclosing patient's confidential matters is a sign of honesty.**

**Third: Truthfulness:**

The physician must be truthful when he says or writes or testifies on any issue. He should guard against kinship or friendship ties or greedy or fear inclinations that may tempt him to give a testimony or a report or a speech that he knows is contrary to fact.

The messenger of Allah, Peace and Blessing of Allah upon him, said, "yes, O'The messenger of Allah'. He said "Associating a partner with Allah, disobeying ones parents". The Prophet kept silent for a while and then he said "and so is presenting a false statement, and so is presenting a false statement". Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Moslem.

Promise - keeping and appointment punctual attendance are but a sign of truthfulness.

**Fourth: Compassion and Sympathy:**

The physician should be sympathetic with his patient's feelings and pity for their sufferings. A part from dealing with them gently, he must be courteous and kind to them. When talking to them he should not incorporate anything that may render them weak or helpless. He should note the difference in patients' psyche and administer the proper techniques that would help them get rid of delusions.

**Fifth: Patience and Tolerance:**

The medical profession is a demanding profession. It entails dealing with people from all walks of life and it requires exercising a lot of patience and tolerance - two qualities a physician must equip himself with. The physician must tolerate patients' manners and must abstain from reciprocating harm by refusing, for example, to treat a patient or diminish his right to be cared for.

### **Sixth: Humility (Humbleness)**

The physician should be modest in his practice. He must not be arrogant or disdainful to his patients; no matter what background they come from. Rather, he should show respect to all who deal with him, patients and guardians alike. Such modesty will be met with respect from others. Besides, he who acts modesty for the sake of Allah, Allah will raise him in the eyes of others.

### **Duties of Physician**

All physicians shall observe the act of practising the medical profession and dentistry profession together with its executive statutes, issued under the Royal Decree No. M3 dated 21.2.1409H.

### **Duties of the Physician towards the Community**

The physician, in safeguarding the public's interest and through the practice of his profession and the available resources at hand, shall spare no effort to contribute his share in serving the community and realizing the following objectives; namely:

1. To practice the profession at the highest possible level of knowledge, expertise, truthfulness and honesty. And to keep abreast of advances made in his specialization.
2. To care for community health through proper health education.
3. To contribute in improving the health services that are provided to the community in his place of work or by other health institutions at large.
4. To render whenever possible contribution in studying health problems in the community, and to propose the relevant proper solutions. Examples are: Smoking.

drug addiction, Road Traffic Accidents, and infectious diseases.

5. To actively participate in the medical research and surveys that yield benefit to the community.
6. To be committed in cooperating with the authorities entrusted with the task of health safeguarding and notifying them of communicable diseases or epidemics.

### **Duties of the Physician Towards Patients**

The physician is expected to skillfully and proficiently render the necessary medical service to his patients via the following:

1. Good listening to patient's complaint and understanding his suffering.
2. Avoidance of arrogance or contempt towards the patient or dealing with him as an object of ridicule or mockery whatever his educational or social background may be.
3. Respecting patient's views, and in particular, views that touch on him personally. This respect should not dissuade the physician from advising the patient on his disease.
4. Treating patients equally without any discrimination on grounds of their difference in their social position or hierarchical ranks, or his personal feelings towards them.
5. Examining the patient gently, observing "patient undressing code", and limiting the examination to the necessary parts of the body for reaching proper diagnosis.  
**(Necessity is measured by its extent)**
6. Requesting only the needed investigations without adding additional tests not warranted by patient's condition.
7. Restricting the prescription of medication or doing an operation to what patient's condition warrants only.

8. Abstaining from any practices that may harm the patient such as utilization of scientifically unrecognized diagnostic or therapeutic procedures.
9. Striving to tell the truth in respect of advising the patient or his trustee of the illness, its causes, complications, the benefits of the diagnostic and therapeutic procedure; and explaining to him clearly the available alternative diagnostic and therapeutic approaches.
10. Resorting to his humane judgement in deciding the merit of either telling a terminally ill patient of the whole or partial truth about his exact disease and its complications; or only telling patient's kin if found by him it is for the best interest of he patient to do so.
11. Exerting utmost care in writing medical reports that serve the right interest. He should neither exaggerate nor diminish the problem.
12. Abstaining from committing infringements of religious rules such as staying alone with women in closed doors (seclusion) or inspecting the genitalia and the like under the pretext of doctor-patient relationship.
13. Referring the patient, should his care need so to another physician specialized in the disease of the referred patient, for more effective treatment. The physician should not hesitate to refer the patient to another physician if his condition demands so.
14. Furnishing the necessary information needed for the treatment of the patient when the treating physician refers him/her to another physician.
15. Helping the patient in obtaining the necessary reports and information should the patient seek the opinion of another physician in respect of his illness.
16. Allowing the patient to consult a substitute physician and allowing him to have information in his file or a detailed medical report explaining his medical condition.
17. Prescribing continuous quality medical care to patients

caught with fatal or incurable diseases until their last moments in life.

18. Ensuring that the patient is receiving the necessary medical care even during his absence, and extending the necessary treatment to the patient in emergency conditions till he is relieved or the care is transferred to another qualified physician.
19. Reporting any practice which conflicts with common law or the ethics of the profession, once he becomes certain of its occurrence.

**Keeping patient's secret and protecting it:**

Islam has commanded keeping the secret and nondisclosure of wrong doing as long as their covering will not lead to sure mischief in society. Knowing patient's secrets does not entitle the physician to divulge or hint at them in away that exposes those secrets except in the following situations.

1. If disclosure for patient relatives or others is beneficial to the patient's treatment or to those who come into contact with him, in order to protect them from (e.g: infectious diseases or drug addiction). In this case disclosure should be limited to those who may be harmed or should know the patient's condition.
2. If disclosure will lead to sure benefit to society or removal of mischief. Disclosure of data can be communicated to the authorities concerned and in instances such as:
  - A. Notification of death resulting from criminal act, or for preventing a possible act of crime.
  - B. Notification of communicable or contagious diseases.
  - C. Refutation of an allegation raised against the physician by the patient or his relatives, smearing his proficiency and the way he practices medicine. Disclosure shall take place only before the authorities concerned.

3. Responding to a court order.
4. Sufficing education needs and within the necessity limits.

**Patient's Consent\*:**

The physician must obtain a consent from the patient he is treating. Consent may assume the following forms:

1. Consent of a patient of legal age (be male or female) or his agent - if the patient's will is passive - shall be obtained prior to any surgical or medical procedure and in accordance with status of the Ministry of Health or the health authorities concerned.
2. **Woman's consent:**  
A woman of legal age (adult) may give her consent for having any medical procedure done for her including surgical procedure. Consent of the husband regarding propagation issue must be obtained.
3. **Consent of legally incompetent person:**  
Consent of legal guardian of a patient who cannot give his consent because he is either unconscious or a minor or mentally incompetent must be obtained; otherwise, consent of the ruler should be obtained.
4. **Consent in Emergency situations:**  
In case the patient's life is in imminent danger or in jeopardy, the physician may carry out a medical or surgical procedure without waiting to obtain the permission if it is established by him that this procedure will save the patient's life or avoid him a significant hazard provided that the observed rules in this respect are adhered to.

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\* Rules of Implementation For Regulations Of The Practice of Medicine and Dentistry.

**Apology to patient for not treating him:**

A physician, in non emergency situations, may abstain from treating a patient for personal or professional reasons provided that such abstinence will not harm the patient's health and a substitute physician for treating the patient is available.

**The Physician and his professional colleagues:**

The relationship of the physician to other members of the medical and paramedical practitioners shall be based on brotherhood, co-operation and mutual respect. The physician must refrain from scoring, belittling or undermining other colleague's abilities, scientific status or experience in the aim of attracting patents away of his colleagues.

The physician should look upon other physicians and medical colleagues as members of a clan of brotherhood working together for a noble goal. In fact they are working together with their varied medical specialties to look after the well fare of the community health. Some members of this team work out the preventive aspects of medical practice, while others will engage into the active management of diseases, yet both will have their contribution for the well fare of their patients.

**Therefore a physician shall observe the following:**

- Well behaving with other colleagues and treating them the way he likes to be treated.
- Refraining from malicious acts against his colleagues, backbiting or following their pitfalls.
- Avoiding direct criticism of his colleagues, especially in the presence of their patients to convince them to change their physician or out of envy. Constructive scientific criticism shall be kept strictly within scientific meetings, conferences and periodicals.
- Due efforts shall be paid to aspects of training and educating his medical team.

Due care shall be exercised to benefit them with his experience, knowledge and skills. Moreover, they should be given ample chance to learn and modify their skills.

### **Continuing Medical Education:**

The ever lasting change in medical knowledge makes it incumbent on the physician to continue learning throughout his life. This is an individual responsibility requiring him to acquaint himself with recent advances made in medicine in general and those pertinent to his specialty in particular. He should spare no chance to increase his knowledge because his competence in treating patients is affected by his diligence, his literacy or ignorance.

He should realize that learning, in addition to its value when employing it in diagnosis and treatment, is in itself a supplication and a tangible implementation of the Glorious Qur'an guidance revealed by Allah the Almighty in his saying "And say, O my lord increase my knowledge".

### **Conducting Research and Studies on Human Subjects:**

It is not permissible to conduct medical studies on a human subject, honoured by Allah the Almighty, unless certain strict conditions are met:

1. Conducting such studies should not entail any harm on man's life, health, or propagation.
2. Informed consent should be obtained from the subject and he must be made fully aware of consequences and the possible harm that may affect him if there is any.
3. The subject should be legally competent i.e. an adult of statutory age and sane in mind. Consent of legal guardian of legally incompetent person should be obtained.
4. It is utterly unallowable to resort to pressure or force or to exploitation of one's need to money or medication when obtaining the consent for carrying out a study.
5. Permission must be obtained from the designated authority trusted with research and experiments in the institution where he works.

### **Conducting Research and Experiments on Animal:**

Islam has commanded kindness to animal. It is rightly reported that the Prophet, Peace and Blessings of Allah upon him, said "A woman is taken to Hell because of a cat-she locked it in: she neither fed it nor left it to eat what sustenance it might find on the ground".

The Prophet, Peace and blessings of Allah upon him, has demanded skillful accomplishment in everything: when you kill, kill skillfully; and when you slaughter, slaughter skillfully. [Should you do it] sharpen your blade and soothe your kill.

Viewed in this perspective, conducting experiments on animal should:

1. Be validated by a noble objective that contribute to medicine advance.
2. Not cause any torture to animal and should alleviate the pain whenever possible.
3. Not be carried out aimlessly.
4. Permission to perform experiments on animals must be obtained from the designated authority in the institution where he works.