Ethical aspects of clinical practice: “doctor-patient relationship”

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### Fiduciary derives from the Latin word for "confidence" or "trust". The bond of trust between the patient and the physician is vital to the diagnostic and therapeutic process. In order for the physician to make accurate diagnoses and provide optimal treatment recommendations, the patient must be able to communicate all relevant information about an illness or injury. Physicians are obliged to refrain from divulging confidential information.

### Occasionally, a physician may face requests for services, such as contraception or abortion, which raise a conflict for the physician. Physicians do not have to provide medical services in opposition to their personal beliefs. In addition, a nonjudgmental discussion with a patient regarding her need for the service and alternative forms of therapy is acceptable. However, it is never appropriate to proselytize. While the physician may decline to provide the requested service, the patient must be treated as a respected, autonomous individual. Where appropriate, the patient should be provided with information about how to obtain the desired service.

Several approaches can be used to facilitate open communication with a patient. Physicians should: sit down; attend to patient comfort; establish eye contact; listen without interrupting; show attention with nonverbal cues, such as nodding; allow silences while patients search for words; acknowledge and legitimize feelings; explain and reassure during examinations; ask explicitly if there are other areas of concern

### Competent patients have a right to refuse medical intervention. Dilemmas may arise when a patient refuses medical intervention but does not withdraw from the role of being a patient. For instance, an intrapartum patient, with a complete placenta previa, who refuses to undergo a cesarean delivery, often does not present the option for the physician to withdraw from participation in her care. In most cases, choices of competent patients must be respected when the patient cannot be persuaded to change them.

### Confidentiality provides the foundation for the physician-patient relationship. In order to make accurate diagnoses and provide optimal treatment recommendations, the physician must have relevant information about the patient's illness or injury. This may require the discussion of sensitive information, which would be embarrassing or harmful if it were known to other persons. The promise of confidentiality permits the patient to trust that information revealed to the physician will not be further disseminated. The expectation of confidentiality derives from the public oath which the physician has taken, and from the accepted code of professional ethics. The physician's duty to maintain confidentiality extends from respect for the patient's autonomy.