## HLTH 2115: MEDICAL ETHICS

Medical ethics are principles about how people who work in health care should behave when they are doing their work. Ethics are guidelines which state what is right or wrong in situations. Ethics may not be about what is legal, but what is expected by peers and professional associations.

# Medical Ethics in the UAE

**Medical Practitioners**

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| The Code of Conduct prescribes the ethical responsibilities expected of all medical practitioners in the UAE. The Code defines the ethical responsibility inherent in the medical practitioner’s role and supports the need to protect and promote the interests of patients in accordance with muslim values and health care ethics as well as the rich cultural heritage and blends of the U.A.E community. Medical practitioners foster a caring and a professional relationship with society based on sound ethical values and this relationship focuses on promoting health, preventing illness, restoring health and alleviating suffering. **This Code intends to:*** Guide and strengthen medical practitioner’s ethical behavior in practice,
* Provide ethical standards to facilitate medical practitioner’s individual and collective reflection and describe expected medical practitioner action,
* Outline the ethical behavior society can generally expect from medical practitioners and the medical profession.

This code is not be exhaustive and is based on three principles namely, *competence*, *respect* and *integrity*. **The day to day behavior of the medical practitioner should demonstrate the following:** |

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| » [1. COMPETENCE](http://www.moh.gov.ae/en/Page_676.aspx)» [2. RESPECT](http://www.moh.gov.ae/en/Page_682.aspx)» [3. INTEGRITY](http://www.moh.gov.ae/en/Page_685.aspx) |

Source: [*http://www.moh.gov.ae/en/Page\_445.aspx*](http://www.moh.gov.ae/en/Page_445.aspx) *(accessed 14/12/09)*

**2.2 Rights Of Patients, Clients, Colleagues & Others**

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| **The Medical Practitioner:** 2.2.1. Respects patient's dignity and privacy. 2.2.2. Treats patients politely and considerately. 2.2.3. In collaboration with other health care professionals, gives patients relevant and meaningful information including diagnosis, treatment, prognosis and cost. 2.2.4. Respects the rights of patients to receive competent treatment without regard for race, nationality or social status and, in an emergency situation, the ability to pay. 2.2.5. Respects the right of colleagues to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment. 2.2.6. Respects the patient’s right to informed consent and to seeking a second opinion regarding the care they receive. 2.2.7. Refrains from subjecting patients to field experiments, medical or surgical practices that have not been proven to be successful in international studies. If patients accept to participate in medical research, the patients consent should be obtained a priori. 2.2.8. Refrains from speaking of one's colleagues in a manner that makes patients doubt their knowledge and skills. 2.2.9. Gives priority to the investigation and treatment of patients solely on the basis of clinical need. 2.2.10. Refrains from discontinuing care for, or ending the life of a terminal patient even when the patient is suffering from pain or when requested by the patient or his legal guardian. In such cases, the physician is expected to do his or her utmost to alleviate the patient's pain.  |

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**UAE Code of Conduct for use of medical records**

**3.1 Maintaining Confidentiality Of Information Regarding The Patient, Others & The Organization**

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| **The Medical Practitioner:** 3.1.1. Recognizes that he/she has a unique access to information. 3.1.2. Retains the strictest confidentiality of all information related to patients concerning their names, social status, health problems and other related information. 3.1.3. Asks patient’s permission, before sharing information with their spouses, or relatives. 3.1.4. Discloses any information regarding patients only with informed consent or as required by a court of law or when the wider public interest justifies disclosure.  |

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**3.2 Carrying Out All Actions & Responsibilities, Honest & Fair Manner**

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| **The Medical Practitioner:** 3.2.1. Accepts the need for testimony at judicial proceedings. 3.2.2. Is truthful and honest in all forms of oral and written communications. 3.2.3. Refrains from harming the personal or professional reputation of colleagues by making unsustainable comments about them. 3.2.4. Acts as a role model in his/her loyalty, accuracy, fairness and justice. 3.2.5. Shares knowledge and skills in a proactive and honest manner with other members of the medical team. 3.2.6. Provides necessary medical assistance irrespective of the patient's financial status. 3.2.7. Is prepared at all times to provide life-saving first aid in emergency situations. 3.2.8. Treats all patients equally without any form of discriminations. 3.2.9. Refrains from refusing or delaying treatment because of the belief that patients' actions have contributed to their condition or because of the risk involved in caring.  |

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**Medical Assistant’s Role in Ethics**

As part of the medical team in a clinic or hospital, you are also expected to work and behave to ethical standards and are responsible for:

* Protecting patient confidentiality
* Following all federal and emirate laws
* Being honest in everything that you do

You must apply ethical standards as you perform your work as a medical administrator. You must keep your own feelings of what is right or wrong separate if they differ from the ethical code in your health organization. For example:

**How do you feel about abortion? Do you think it’s right or wrong?**

Your notes from the class discussion:

You must keep your personal opinions to yourself and treat every customer with the same respect.

# Patient Advocacy

Your most important job as a medical administrator is to be a patient advocate. This means that you the best interests of the patient is the most important priority for you. It often means that you have to put you own wants, needs, beliefs, values and biases aside. You should not be forced to compromise your own value system.

# Patient Confidentiality

Confidentiality of patient information is one of the most important ethical principles. **You must never give information about a patient to anyone without the permission of the patient, unless is a legal requirement**.

What exactly is confidential in your dealings with patients?

* What you say to them and they say to you.
* What you do with the patient and what they do when they are with you.
* All documents about the patients.
* All notes from medical staff about the patients.

When you work with patients, they may be nervous, frightened and unhappy. They may tell you things that they wouldn’t tell you in normal circumstances. Family and friends may contact your office to ask about the patient’s condition or to get information. They may care about the patient, but NO INFORMATION must be given to anyone without written permission from the patient.

# Honesty (Integrity)

Everyone makes mistakes. How we manage those mistakes shows our ethical standards. If you make a mistake (eg type the wrong information on a patient’s report) you must report the error to your supervisor immediately. **A true professional is able to admit mistakes and take full responsibility for all actions**.

Take care when sharing information with patients. Here are some tips:

* Give facts in a straight way – don’t try to be sympathetic
* Never offer false hope eg “I’m sure you’ll be fine”
* Tell the truth about risks and benefits of drugs and/or medical procedures
* If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t make one up! Instead, say “I don’t know, but I will find out for you”.
* Treat all patients with dignity, respect and honesty so that people can learn to trust you and know that you are professional in your work

# Ethical Issues in Office Management

Some ideas about ethical situations in the office:

* Financial interest (profit) must not be the first priority.
* If the physician wants to charge for cancelled appointments within 24 hours of a scheduled appointment, a warning notice must be posted in the reception area to let people know about this rule.
* Patient medical records must never be held in exchange for payment of a bill
* Fees must not be too much. Guidelines for charges should be given and should reflect the difficulty of the services required for the patient’s condition.
* No fees should be charged for physician referrals or for admitting a patient to the hospital
* A fee should not be charged to the patient for completing or filing a simple insurance form.
* Take care when using computers to make sure that patient information is confidential. Take extra care when using fax machines to send documents.
* If a physician closes his or her practice, or dies, all patients must be notified that the office is closing and must be given instructions about how to get their medical records.

***Discussion Questions (critical thinking)***

1. A friend knows that you are studying Health Office Technology and asks you to diagnose her rash. What do you say?
2. A patient owes a lot of money for medical treatment and does not have insurance. She request copies of her medical records. What do you do?
3. You think that a new member of staff in the office is stealing drugs. What do you do?
4. You are the administrative officer for a doctor in a clinic. Recently he has become forgetful. No-one else has noticed a problem. Should you report your concerns? If yes, who would you report to?