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BASIC PRINCIPLES IN MEDICAL ETHICS

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ANCIENT ROOTS OF MEDICAL ETHICS, THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH: LATE FIFTH CENTURY BCE

A MODERN RE-WORDING FOLLOWS

- I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant: I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.
- I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required, avoiding those twin traps of over-treatment and therapeutic nihilism.


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- I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.
- I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.


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- I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given to me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

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- I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.
- I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

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- I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.
- If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.


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EXCERPT FROM THE CLASSICAL VERSION


- “Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.”

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**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS:
BENEFICENCE**

- *Beneficence* means that a professional conducts the treatment process for the well-being and good of the patient.
- Edmund Pellegrino translates this as meaning that healing is the fundamental principle of medical ethics.
- Medical activities such as cosmetic surgery and euthanasia are at least borderline for this principle.




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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS: NON-MALEFICENCE

- *Non-maleficence* means a professional conducts treatment process in such a way as to avoid harm to the patient.
- Recent example of psychologists designing and implementing torture at Guantanamo is an example of maleficence.
- For the biofeedback practitioner, this means first, being aware of, and minimizing the impact of adverse treatment effects.




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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS: NON-MALEFICENCE (CONT.)


- It could also mean that the professional seeks to avoid harm that might come from a less than optimal choice of treatment.

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**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS:
FIDELITY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

- *Fidelity and Responsibility* signifies that practitioners will establish a relationship of trust with each patient, remaining faithful to professional standards and accepting responsibility for their actions




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**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS:
AUTONOMY**

- *Autonomy* signifies that a professional will conduct the treatment process in a fashion so as to respect and preserve the autonomy of the patient.
- Autonomy reflects the humanistic principle that each human being has a right to self-determination.




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**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS:
AUTONOMY**

- The principle of a *truly informed consent* is a correlary to the basic principle of autonomy.
- Making decisions for the patient, without full-disclosure of the implications of the decision, violates the autonomy of the patient.




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**FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS:
JUSTICE**

- *Justice* signifies that a professional will cultivate a strong sense of fairness and justice, and allow these principles to govern treatment relationships.
- Justice for a biofeedback practitioner may mean that every prospective patient is entitled to access to treatment and to equal quality in service and therapeutics.



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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS: JUSTICE (CONT.)

- Justice may lead a professional to question the terms of an HMO contract which seem to arbitrarily deny access to adequate quality of care for specific subgroups of patients

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