

The Hippocratic Oath: The Original and Revised Version
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Life is short, the art long; Hippocrates once said of the art and science of medicine. The Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, upheld high standards for treating patients and laid down these rules for all to-be physicians to follow. His testament came to be taken as an oath on finishing medical school, as a rite of passage.

The Hippocratic Oath is the oldest and most widely known treatise on medical ethics. It requires new physicians to swear by numerous healing gods and dictates the duties and responsibilities of the physician while treating patients. There are two versions of the Hippocratic Oath: the original one and the modern one. The need for a revision was felt as drastic procedures like abortions & surgeries became commonplace and medically valid, questioning a physician's morals anew.

Let's consider the classical one:

The Classic Hippocratic Oath

"I swear by Apollo the physician, and Aesculapius the surgeon, likewise Hygeia and Panacea, and call all the gods and goddesses to witness, that I will observe and keep this underwritten oath, to the utmost of my power and judgment.

I will reverence my master who taught me the art. Equally with my parents, will I allow him things necessary for his support, and will consider his sons as brothers. I will teach them my art without reward or agreement; and I will impart all my acquirement, instructions, and whatever I know, to my master's children, as to my own; and likewise to all my pupils, who shall bind and tie themselves by a professional oath, but to none else.

*With regard to healing the sick, I will devise and order for them the best diet, according to my judgment and means; and **I will take care that they suffer no hurt or damage.***

Nor shall any man's entreaty prevail upon me to administer poison to anyone; neither will I counsel any man to do so. Moreover, I will give no sort of medicine to any pregnant woman, with a view to destroy the child.

Further, I will comport myself and use my knowledge in a godly manner.

I will not cut for the stone, but will commit that affair entirely to the surgeons.

*Whatsoever house I may enter, my visit shall be for the convenience and advantage of the patient; and **I will willingly refrain from doing any injury or wrong from falsehood, and (in an especial manner) from acts of an amorous nature**, whatever may be the rank of those who it may be my duty to cure, whether mistress or servant, bond or free.*

Whatever, in the course of my practice, I may see or hear (even when not invited), whatever I may happen to obtain knowledge of, if it be not proper to repeat it, I will keep sacred and secret within my own breast.

If I faithfully observe this oath, may I thrive and prosper in my fortune and profession, and live in the estimation of posterity; or on breach thereof, may the reverse be my fate!"

This Hippocratic Oath has been modified and revised several times. In 1960, the words “*utmost respect for life from its beginning*” were added, making it a more secular concept, not to be taken in the presence of gods but in front of other people.

The Oath was rewritten in **1964 by Dr. Louis Lasagna**, Academic Dean at Tufts University School of Medicine and this revised form is widely accepted in today’s medical schools. The modern or revised version of Hippocratic Oath is:

The Revised Hippocratic Oath

"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 overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.

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.

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 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.

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.

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."

Thus, the classical Oath of Hippocratic involves the triad of the physician the patient and God, while the revised version involves only the physician and the patient, relieving the Gods of a few responsibilities.

Note that this revised oath does not contain a specific clause to “take care that they suffer no hurt or damage” (do no harm clause) - and that the references to giving poison or participating in a procedure that will destroy the child of a pregnant woman are removed. So is the statement about refraining from “acts of an amorous nature.” While adding in the clause “to not play God,” it also adds a clause about

recognizing the power to take life as an awesome responsibility to be faced with humility - but no statement about refraining from doing so.

American Medical Association Code of Ethics (post- 1980)

Preamble: The medical profession has long subscribed to a body of ethical statements developed primarily for the benefit of the patient. As a member of this profession, a physician must recognize responsibility not only to patients, but also to society, to other health professionals, and to self. The following Principles adopted by the [AMA] are not laws, but standards of conduct which define the essentials of honorable behavior for the physician.

II. A physician shall deal honestly with patients and colleagues, and strive to expose those physicians deficient in character or competence, or who engage in fraud or deception.

III. A physician shall respect the law and also recognize a responsibility to seek changes in those requirements which are contrary to the best interests of the patient.

IV. A physician shall respect the rights of patients, of colleagues, and of other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences within the constraints of the law.

V. A physician shall continue to study, apply and advance scientific knowledge, make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and the public, obtain consultation, and use the talents of other health professionals when indicated.

VI. A physician shall, in the provision of appropriate patient care, except in emergencies, be free to choose whom to serve, with whom to associate, and the environment in which to provide medical services.

VII. A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to an improved community.

Notice there is no statement about “do no harm” or anything related to refraining from taking a life. The oath developed by Louis Weinstein includes this: “ I shall always have the highest respect for human life and remember that it is wrong to terminate life in certain circumstances, permissible in some, and an act of supreme love in others.” That is permission for abortion and assisted suicide.

The Physician’s Pledge: The Declaration of Geneva, A Modern Version of the Hippocratic Oath*

AS A MEMBER OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION:

I SOLEMNLY PLEDGE to dedicate my life to the service of humanity;

THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MY PATIENT will be my first consideration;

I WILL RESPECT the autonomy and dignity of my patient;

I WILL MAINTAIN the utmost respect for human life;

I WILL NOT PERMIT considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene between my duty and my patient;

I WILL RESPECT the secrets that are confided in me, even after the patient has died;

I WILL PRACTISE my profession with conscience and dignity and in accordance with good medical practice;

I WILL FOSTER the honour and noble traditions of the medical profession;

I WILL GIVE to my teachers, colleagues, and students the respect and gratitude that is their due;

I WILL SHARE my medical knowledge for the benefit of the patient and the advancement of healthcare;

I WILL ATTEND TO my own health, well-being, and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard;

I WILL NOT USE my medical knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties, even under threat;

I MAKE THESE PROMISES solemnly, freely and upon my honour.

*Adopted by the World Medical Association in September 1948; last updated October 2017.

This version includes a clause to “maintain the utmost respect for human life,” but there are no clauses that specifically promise to refrain from causing harm, participating in killing the patient or the pregnant woman’s child, or “acts of an amorous nature.” It adds in a clause about “sexual orientation” which opens the door to mutilation of those with sexual dysphoria and even forcing medical personall to participate in such delusions