

Endorsement of Declaration of Professional Responsibility: Medicine's Social Contract with Humanity

Approved by the Board of Trustees, June 2002

Approved by the Assembly, May 2002

"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees...These are...position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects..." – *APA Operations Manual*.

Preamble

Never in the history of human civilization has the well-being of each individual been so inextricably linked to that of every other. Plagues and pandemics respect no national borders in a world of global commerce and travel. Wars and acts of terrorism enlist innocents as combatants and mark civilians as targets. Advances in medical science and genetics, while promising great good, may also be harnessed as agents of evil. The unprecedented scope and immediacy of these universal challenges demand concerted action and response by all.

As physicians, we are bound in our response by a common heritage of caring for the sick and the suffering. Through the centuries, individual physicians have fulfilled this obligation by applying their skills and knowledge competently, selflessly and at times heroically. Today, our profession must reaffirm its historical commitment to combat natural and man-made assaults on the health and wellbeing of humankind. Only by acting together across geographic and ideological divides can we overcome such powerful threats. Humanity is our patient.

Declaration

We, the members of the world community of physicians, solemnly commit ourselves to:

- I. Respect human life and the dignity of every individual.
 - II. Refrain from supporting or committing crimes against humanity and condemn all such acts.
 - III. Treat the sick and injured with competence and compassion and without prejudice.
 - IV. Apply our knowledge and skills when needed, though doing so may put us at risk.
 - V. Protect the privacy and confidentiality of those for whom we care and breach that confidence only when keeping it would seriously threaten their health and safety or that of others.
 - VI. Work freely with colleagues to discover, develop, and promote advances in medicine and public health that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being.
 - VII. Educate the public and polity about present and future threats to the health of humanity.
 - VIII. Advocate for social, economic, educational, and political changes that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being.
- Teach and mentor those who follow us for they are the future of our caring profession.

We make these promises solemnly, freely, and upon our personal and professional honor.

