



## **AAPM Position Statement on Ethical Practice of Pain Medicine**

### **Summary**

The American Academy of Pain Medicine (AAPM) is a medical specialty society representing physicians practicing in the field of Pain Medicine. The management of pain is fundamental to the practice of medicine. All physicians have an obligation to address acute and persistent pain. Adequate assessment and management of many types of pain states require a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach with one physician having primary responsibility for coordination and continuity of care.

### **Background**

AAPM endorses both the American Medical Association's (AMA) Principles of Medical Ethics, which focus on our primary obligation to our patients, and the AMA's Declaration of Professional Responsibility, which specifies the duties of physicians to humanity (see Appendixes A and B). *The AAPM Position Statement on the Ethical Practice of Pain Medicine* is a complementary document developed to address the unique scope and breadth of the practice of Pain Medicine.

### **Ethical Tenets**

The ethical imperative to provide relief from pain requires all physicians to apply themselves toward improvement in the following areas:

- assessment of the pain sufferer as a whole person, including all relevant biological, social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions pertaining to etiology and impact of pain
- treatment of the person in pain with competence and compassion
- education of professional colleagues, patients, the public, and policy-makers on the principles and methods of Pain Medicine
- support of and/or participation in basic and clinical pain research
- advocacy to ensure access to pain care and its continuous improvement.

### **Recommendations**

AAPM supports the normalization of Pain Medicine within all patient care settings so that exceptional interest, commitment, and moral courage are not required to meet the needs of patients in pain, and especially those with persistent or complex pain disorders. AAPM further recognizes and accepts a commitment to overcome professional and social obstacles to the alleviation of human pain. Specifically, this includes the commitment to

- facilitate patient access to Pain Medicine services

### ***Recommendations – continued***

- encourage medical institutions to assign priority to routine pain assessment and management
- encourage a focus on the diagnosis and treatment of underlying conditions that contribute to pain
- avoid acting on unwarranted patient claims of disability
- encourage professional education on adequate and thorough assessment of pain in all patients
- provide education about adequate assessment of disability arising from persistent pain problems
- familiarize members and colleagues with new evidence-based findings and concepts about pain, its assessment, and its treatment
- provide education in pain treatment–related substance misuse, abuse, addiction, and diversion, including risk assessment and management
- assist in resolving concerns about iatrogenic addiction and its detection, prevention, and management
- participate in Pain Medicine–related advocacy and policy development.

### **References**

See attached documents from the American Medical Association - Appendix A & B

*© Adopted by the American Academy of Pain Medicine Council on Ethics, December 2007  
Reviewed March 2011*

## **Appendix A. American Medical Association Principles of Medical Ethics**

### **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 to patients first and foremost, as well as to society, to other health professionals, and to self. The following Principles adopted by the American Medical Association are not laws, but standards of conduct which define the essentials of honorable behavior for the physician.

- I. A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.
- II. A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions, and strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence, or engaging in fraud or deception, to appropriate entities.
- 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, colleagues, and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences and privacy within the constraints of the law.
- V. A physician shall continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge, maintain a commitment to medical education, 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 care.
- VII. A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community and the betterment of public health.
- VIII. A physician shall, while caring for a patient, regard responsibility to the patient as paramount.
- IX. A physician shall support access to medical care for all people.

*Adopted June 1957; revised June 1980; revised June 2001.*

## **Appendix B. American Medical Association Declaration of Professional Responsibility**

### **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 well-being 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:

1. Respect human life and the dignity of every individual.
2. Refrain from supporting or committing crimes against humanity and condemn all such acts.
3. Treat the sick and injured with competence and compassion and without prejudice.
4. Apply our knowledge and skills when needed, though doing so may put us at risk.
5. 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.
6. Work freely with colleagues to discover, develop, and promote advances in medicine and public health that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being.
7. Educate the public and polity about present and future threats to the health of humanity.
8. Advocate for social, economic, educational, and political changes that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being.
9. 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.