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THE WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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Policy

World Medical Association Declaration of Seoul on Professional Autonomy and Clinical Independence

Adopted by the WMA General Assembly, Seoul, Korea, October 2008

The World Medical Association, having explored the importance of professional autonomy and physician clinical independence, hereby adopts the following principles:

1. The central element of professional autonomy and clinical independence is the assurance that individual physicians have the freedom to exercise their professional judgment in the care and treatment of their patients without undue influence by outside parties or individuals.
2. Medicine is a highly complex art and science. Through lengthy training and experience, physicians become medical experts and healers. Whereas patients have the right to decide to a large extent which medical interventions they will undergo, they expect their physicians to be free to make clinically appropriate recommendations.
3. Although physicians recognize that they must take into account the structure of the health system and available resources, unreasonable restraints on clinical independence imposed by governments and administrators are not in the best interests of patients, not least because they can damage the trust which is an essential component of the patient-physician relationship.
4. Hospital administrators and third-party payers may consider physician professional autonomy to be incompatible with prudent management of health care costs. However, the restraints that administrators and third-party payers attempt to place on clinical independence may not be in the best interests of patients. Furthermore, restraints on the ability of physicians to refuse demands by patients or their families for inappropriate medical services are not in the best interests of either patients or society.
5. The World Medical Association reaffirms the importance of professional autonomy and clinical independence not only as an essential component of high quality medical care and therefore a benefit to the patient that must be preserved, but also as an essential principle of medical professionalism. The World Medical Association therefore re-dedicating itself to maintaining and assuring the continuation of professional autonomy and clinical independence in the care of patients.

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