

DECLARATION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FOR MEDICAL PROFESSION

Board of FEMS. General Assembly May 2026, Wrocław, Poland

Preamble

Doctors play an essential and irreplaceable role in protecting people's health, well-being and dignity. Their professional practice implies a permanent commitment to the well-being of others, medical science and the highest ethical principles. However, in order to fully and safely fulfil that commitment, doctors must have **conditions that guarantee their own fundamental rights**.

This Declaration is inspired by principles enshrined in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the instruments of the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the standards of the **Council of Europe** and the **World Health Organization**, as well as the values expressed by the medical profession through its colleges, trade unions and scientific associations (this document is inspired partially in the proposal of The Forum of Medical Profession of Spain who works this field based on the initial idea and demand of FEMS)).

Acknowledging the specificity of the medical profession – in terms of its level of training, its social responsibility and the conditions in which it is carried out – this Declaration proclaims a set of **fundamental rights** that must be recognized, respected and promoted by health systems, public authorities and society as a whole.

a) Rights related to professional autonomy

Professional autonomy is an essential pillar of medical practice, ensuring that clinical decisions are made with independence, scientific rigour and ethical commitment. This autonomy not only protects the integrity of the medical act but also ensures that patient care is based on technical and human criteria, free from external pressures of a political, economic or administrative nature. Recognising and protecting this autonomy is essential to preserve the quality of care, the trust of citizens and the dignity of the medical profession.

R1.- The right to practice medicine with **clinical autonomy and independent professional judgment**, without undue interference of an administrative, political or economic nature.

R2.- The right to have medical decisions, **freedom of prescription and of diagnostic and therapeutic indications**, in accordance with up-to-date scientific knowledge, professional ethics, the patient's needs and values and the doctor's own judgment and values, within a framework of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

R3.- The right to **conscientious objection** to procedures that profoundly contradict the ethical or moral convictions of the professional, within the framework of current legislation.

R4.- The right not to be forced to discriminate against patients and not to be discriminated against

b). Labour rights and working conditions

The practice of medicine requires working conditions that guarantee the safety, dignity and effectiveness of the medical act. The overload of care, precariousness and lack of resources compromise not only the health of the professional, but also the quality of care received by citizens. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the right of doctors to carry out their work in appropriate environments, with stability, fair remuneration and opportunities for professional development, as the basis of a sustainable and humane health system.

R5.- The right to a **safe, healthy and dignified working environment**, with sufficient means and resources and conditions compatible with the good practice of medicine. This includes with effective occupational risk prevention systems that include the physical, biological, chemical and psychosocial factors inherent to medical work.

R6.- The right to **non-discrimination in terms of employment and occupation**, especially in terms of job stability and computable retirement benefits.

R7.- The right to a **reasonable working hours** with sufficient rest time, periodic holidays and effective limitation of continuous working hours.

R8.- The right to fair **remuneration**, in accordance with the level of training, the responsibility assumed and the emotional and physical burden of exercising the profession.

R9.- The right to **recognition of learning, training and research** as part of the professional activity, with dedicated time for the development of both functions within the working day.

c). Rights against violence, discrimination or harassment

The medical profession must be practiced in an environment free of violence, discrimination and harassment, where the dignity of each professional is respected. Aggression, abuse of power and discrimination for any reason violate not only individual rights, but also the ethical fabric of health institutions.

It is essential to establish effective protection, reporting and redress mechanisms, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as students and young doctors, ensuring a safe, fair and respectful environment for all.

R.10.- The right to carry out their work in an environment **free of violence, harassment or intimidation**, both by users, employers, institutions, and other professionals.

d). Right to health

The physical and mental well-being of doctors is essential to the quality and safety of care. Constant exposure to suffering, emotional pressure and work overload make medicine a profession with high psychosocial risks.

R11.- The right to safety and health in professional practice, with special attention to emotional exhaustion, physical and mental strain, and chronic stress derived from medical practice.

e). Collective rights and professional participation

The active participation of physicians in the organization and governance of the health system strengthens the quality, equity, and efficiency of care. The right to associate, to be represented and to intervene in the definition of their working and professional conditions is fundamental to ensure that decisions are made with clinical knowledge, ethical responsibility and a vision of public service. The medical voice must be heard and respected at all levels of decision-making.

R12.- The right to **freedom of association and unionization and specific medical representativeness within the trade union context**, for the collective defence of professional, labour and deontological interests.

R13.- The right to **play a significant role, through their representatives, in the political, decision-making, and organizational processes** affecting their professional activity

R14.- The right to strike and to express any form of protest they consider effective for their purpose

Epilogue

The effective guarantee of these rights is a **necessary and indispensable condition for the quality and sustainability of health care**. Through this Declaration, the signatory organizations express their willingness to collaborate for its promotion, defence and application, for the benefit of patients, professionals and society as a whole.