



A Catalogue of Physician's Oaths

As doctors we live in a difficult time. We are pulled in so many different directions. When I first started practice, (I finished my residency in 1977) it was far easier to keep one's priorities on what should always be the first consideration: the welfare of the patient. Since then our focus has shifted. For younger folks entering practice, family time and interests outside of medicine take priority. They raise an interesting argument that the well rounded, complete person makes the better doctor. Perhaps.

The biggest conflict for the physician in practice is rising costs of medical care and a system of rationing, some of it irrational rationing, created by insurers, HMO's and hospitals. If we follow the directives of the insurers, the individual patient's welfare no longer is paramount. Doctors, they tell us, need to be efficient providers of medical care. It is more important that the patient or medical consumer or "customer" as he or she is now called, feels satisfied, that he or she has gotten a good deal, feels taken care of. Customer perception takes precedence over reality. Health care is now primarily managed by business types which means it has turned into a commodity not unlike any other consumer product. The physician who has entered practice on the basis of youthful lofty ideals such as the love of science, or wanting to serve humanity, is diminished by materialistic fiscal concerns. Now, more than ever, it is important for the doctor to know who he or she is. Physicians must not lose sight of why it originally was they entered medicine and of the proud history and ideals of the profession.

At my own medical school, graduates were no longer required to take the Hippocratic Oath. This is ancient, now outdated, and inconsistent with today's medical mores. Many medical schools no longer use these oaths at graduation, and for good reason. None is universally true or appropriate. I have presented below a collection of a number of these oaths although I believe that of the great physician Maimonides which I have placed last, below has come closest to my own ideals.

Since then I have tried to set down some of the ideals as I try to practice them, not in the form of an oath but as a set of expectations for patient care. I'm aware that a lot of people wouldn't agree with some of my own ideas. I also added some Principles of Practice from the American Medical Association. You'll find this below the last Oath and Prayer of Maimonides. See what you think.

Oath of Hippocrates

"I swear by Apollo the physician, and Æsculapius, and Hygeia, and Panacea, and all the gods and goddesses, that according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this oath and its stipulations -- to reckon him who taught me this art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him, and to relieve his necessities if required; to look upon his offspring in the same footing as my own brothers, and to teach them this art if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation, and that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine, but to none other.

I will follow that system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion. With purity and holiness I will pass my life and practice my art. I will not cut persons laboring under the stone, but will leave this to be done by men who are practitioners of this work. Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption; and, further, from the seduction of females or males, of freemen and slaves. Whatever, in connection with my professional practice, or not in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men, which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret.

While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of this art, respected by all men, in all time. But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot."

Physician's Oath

The World Medical Association, Declaration of Geneva (1948). Adopted by the General Assembly of the World Medical Association, Geneva, Switzerland, September 1948 and amended by the 22nd World Medical Assembly, Sydney, Australia, August 1968.

The [World Medical Association](#) is an association of national medical associations. This oath seems to be a response to the atrocities committed by doctors in Nazi Germany. Notably, this oath requires the physician to "not use [his] medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity." This document was adopted by the World Medical Association only three months before the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#) which provides for the security of the body.

At the time of being admitted as a member of the medical profession:

- *I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity;*
- *I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due;*

- *I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity; the health of my patient will be my first consideration;*
 - *I will maintain by all the means in my power, the honor and the noble traditions of the medical profession; my colleagues will be my brothers;*
 - *I will not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race, party politics or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient;*
 - *I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception, even under threat, I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity;*
 - *I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honor.*
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The Loma Linda University Physician's Oath
(Revised 16 December 1998)

"Before God these things I do promise:

In the acceptance of my sacred calling,

I will dedicate my life to the furtherance of Jesus Christ's healing and teaching ministry.

I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due. I will impart to those who follow me, the knowledge and experience that I have gained.

The wholeness of my patient will be my first consideration.

Acting as a good steward of the resources of society and of the talents granted me, I will endeavor to reflect God's mercy and compassion by caring for the lonely, the poor, the suffering, and those who are dying.

I will maintain the utmost respect for human life. I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity. I will respect the rights and decision of my patients.

I will hold in confidence all secrets committed to my keeping in the practice of my calling.

I will lead my life and practice my art with purity, and honor; abstaining from immorality myself, I will not lead others into moral wrong doing.

May God's kingdom, His healing power and glory be experienced by those whom I serve, and may they be made known in my life, in proportion as I am faithful to this oath."

The Oath of Amatus
by Amatus Lusitanus (1511-1568)

From "Jews and Medicine, Religion, Culture, and Science" (Jewish Publication Society). Also Aaron J. Feingold, M.D. from this book *Three Jewish Physicians of the Renaissance. The Marriage of Science, and Ethics*. Copyright 1994 by the American Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth.

"I swear by God the Almighty and Eternal (and by His most holy Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai by Moses the lawgiver) that I never in my medical practice departed from what has been handed down in good faith to us and posterity; that I have never practiced deception, I have never overstated or made changes for the sake of gain, that I have ever striven that benefit might accrue to mankind; that I have praised non one nor censured anyone to indulge private interests, but only when truth demanded it. If I speak with falsehood, may God and His Angel Raphael punish me with Their eternal wrath and may on one henceforth place trust in me. I have not been desirous for he remuneration for medical services and have treated many without accepting any fee, but with none the less care. I have often unselfishly and firmly refused remuneration that was offered, preferring through diligent care to restore the patient to health, to being enrich3ed by his generosity. (I have given my services in equal manner to all, to Hebrews, Christians, and Muslims.) Loftiness of station has never influenced me and I have accorded the same care to the poor as to those of exalted rank. I have never produced disease. I have favored no druggist unless he excelled others in skill in his art and in character. In prescribing drugs I have exercised moderation guided by the physical condition of the invalid. I have never revealed a secret entrusted in me. I have never given a fatal draught. No woman has ever brought about an abortion with my aid. In short, I have done nothing which might be considered unbecoming an honorable and distinguished physician having always held Hippocrates and Galen before me as examples worthy of imitation and not having scorned the precepts of many other excellent practitioners of our art. I have endured the loss of private fortune, and have suffered frequent and dangerous journeys and even exile with calmness and unflagging courage, as befits a philosopher. The many students who have come to me have all been regarded a though they were my sons, I have used my best efforts to instruct them and to urge them to good conduct. I have published my medical works not to satisfy ambition, but that I might, in some measure, contribute to the furtherance of the health of mankind; I leave to others the judgment of whether I have succeeded; such at least has always been my aim and ever had the foremost place in my prayers."

The Physician's Oath and Prayer of Maimonides

Translated by Harry Friedenwald, Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital 28: 260-261, (1917).

MOSES MAIMONIDES (1135/38-1204) (in Hebrew: Rav or Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, or "RaMBaM" -- the acronym of his name), was the most important Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. Maimonides was born in the Spanish city of Cordoba at a time when about one-fifth of the people in southern Spain were Jews. However, Maimonides and his family fled to Fustat (now Cairo) because of rising anti-Semitism in Spain. There Maimonides worked as a physician, but also became a scholar of Jewish law and a philosopher.



Among other works, Maimonides wrote "[The Guide of the Perplexed](#)," a treatment of several philosophical issues. His attempts to synthesize Jewish revelation and Aristotelean philosophy influenced the ideas of many Christian thinkers including St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas. He became physician to the Sultan Saladin and a communal leader of Egyptian Jewry, and he became an important figure in the codification of Jewish law. In his later years Maimonides became famous throughout Europe. England's King Richard asked him to be his Royal Physician, but Maimonides preferred to stay in Cairo and pursue his work there.

The "Daily Prayer Of A Physician" is attributed to Maimonides, but was probably written by Marcus Herz, a German physician, pupil of Immanuel Kant, and physician to Moses Mendelssohn. It first appeared in print in about 1793.

THE OATH OF MAIMONIDES

"The eternal providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love for my art actuate me at all time; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children.

May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain.

Grant me the strength, time and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is immense and the spirit of man can extend indefinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements.

Today he can discover his errors of yesterday and tomorrow he can obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today. Oh, God, Thou has appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation and now I turn unto my calling."

THE PRAYER OF MAIMONIDES

"Almighty God, Thou has created the human body with infinite wisdom. Ten thousand times ten thousand organs hast Thou combined in it that act unceasingly and harmoniously to preserve the whole in all its beauty the body which is the envelope of the immortal soul. They are ever acting in perfect order, agreement and accord. Yet, when the frailty of matter or the unbridling of passions deranges this order or interrupts this accord, then forces clash and the body crumbles into the primal dust from which it came. Thou sendest to man diseases as beneficent messengers to foretell approaching danger and to urge him to avert it.

Thou has blest Thine earth, Thy rivers and Thy mountains with healing substances; they enable Thy creatures to alleviate their sufferings and to heal their illnesses. Thou hast endowed man with the wisdom to relieve the suffering of his brother, to recognize his disorders, to extract the healing substances, to discover their powers and to prepare and to apply them to suit every ill. In Thine Eternal Providence Thou hast chosen me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. I am now about to apply myself to the duties of my profession. Support me, Almighty God, in these great labors that they may benefit mankind, for without Thy help not even the least thing will succeed.

Inspire me with love for my art and for Thy creatures. Do not allow thirst for profit, ambition for renown and admiration, to interfere with my profession, for these are the enemies of truth and of love for mankind and they can lead astray in the great task of attending to the welfare of Thy creatures. Preserve the strength of my body and of my soul that they ever be ready to cheerfully help and support rich and poor, good and bad, enemy as well as friend. In the sufferer let me see only the human being. Illumine my mind that it recognize what presents itself and that it may comprehend what is absent or hidden. Let it not fail to see what is visible, but do not permit it to arrogate to itself the power to see what cannot be seen, for delicate and indefinite are the bounds of the great art of caring for the lives and health of Thy creatures. Let me never be absent-minded. May no strange thoughts divert my attention at the bedside of the sick, or disturb my mind in its silent labors, for great and sacred are the thoughtful deliberations required to preserve the lives and health of Thy creatures.

Grant that my patients have confidence in me and my art and follow my directions and my counsel. Remove from their midst all charlatans and the whole host of of ficious relatives and know-all nurses, cruel people who arrogantly frustrate the wisest purposes of our art and often lead Thy creatures to their death.

Should those who are wiser than I wish to improve and instruct me, let my soul gratefully follow their guidance; for vast is the extent of our art. Should conceited fools, however, censure me, then let love for my profession steel me against them, so that I remain steadfast without regard for age, for reputation, or for honor, because surrender would bring to Thy creatures sickness and death.

Imbue my soul with gentleness and calmness when older colleagues, proud of their age, wish to displace me or to scorn me or disdainfully to teach me. May even this be of advantage to me, for they know many things of which I am ignorant, but let not their arrogance give me pain. For they are old and old age is not master of the passions. I also hope to attain old age upon this earth, before Thee, Almighty God!

Let me be contented in everything except in the great science of my profession. Never allow the thought to arise in me that I have attained to sufficient knowledge, but vouchsafe to me the strength, the leisure and the ambition ever to extend my knowledge. For art is great, but the mind of man is ever expanding.

Almighty God! Thou hast chosen me in Thy mercy to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures. I now apply myself to my profession. Support me in this great task so that it may benefit mankind, for without Thy help not even the least thing will succeed."

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.