

# Code of Ethics

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## OBJECTIVE/RATIONALE

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A Code of Medical Ethics is a code of conduct that establishes standards that govern decisions and behavior of those entrusted with providing health care. Many professions related to health care have adopted specific codes of ethics. The student is expected to compare published professional codes of ethics.

TEKS 121.3 (c) 2A

TAKS ELA 1, 4  
Social Studies 5

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## KEY POINTS

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Codes of ethics related to health care delivery do not provide specific solutions to issues but serve as guides for ethical and moral conduct. Codes of ethics govern the behavior of health care professionals in a particular field.

### I. Definition of ethics:

- a. Ethics is the study of right and wrong, based on moral law. It is a system of moral principles or standards governing conduct. It centers around respect for the needs and rights of other people. Ethics provides guidelines for acceptable behavior. Ethical behavior is a goal to be achieved requiring constant effort.
- b. All professions have a “Code of Ethics” or well defined rules and standards governing the conduct of the members.

### II. Historical development of medical code of ethics:

- a. Hippocrates, a Greek physician of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, B.C., wrote one of the first medical codes of ethics, the Hippocratic Oath. This oath is still used by some medical schools at graduation exercises.
- b. Maimonides, a Hebrew physician in Egypt in the twelfth century, wrote the Prayer of Maimonides, which incorporates ethical principles.
- c. The “Nightingale Pledge” was formulated by a committee of the Farrand School of Nursing, Harper Hospital, Detroit, Michigan. This is an oath, pledged by nurses or graduation that states the ethical standards of their profession.
- d. The Second General Assembly of the World Medical Association in 1948 adopted the Declaration of Geneva. This statement of medical ethics is used by some medical schools at graduation exercises.

### III. Code of ethics:

1. The primary goal of the health care worker is to promote an optimal level of wellness, preserve life, and provide for a peaceful death when necessary.
2. The health care worker respects the religious beliefs and cultural values of all clients.
3. The health care worker provides adequate and continuous care for all clients regardless of age, gender, race, or nature of the illness or injury.
4. The health care worker knows the limits of practice for which he or she is competent and stays within those limits.
5. The health care worker maintains competence and current knowledge by pursuing continuing education.
6. The health care worker practices jurisprudent behavior at all times by avoiding unethical or illegal practices.

7. The health care worker respects the dignity and rights of each client by maintaining confidentiality and a professional attitude regarding all information relating to the client.
8. The health care worker asks for clarification and assistance when unsure of any aspect of care.
9. The health care worker participates in professional activities and organizations to provide better health care.
10. The health care worker maintains a high standard of ethical and legal behavior in his or her private as well as professional life.

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### **ACTIVITIES**

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- I. Break into groups and compare and contrast the differences and similarities of the Nightingale Pledge and the Hippocratic Oath.
- II. Analyze several codes of ethics and identify similarities and differences.
- III. Complete a 'Code of Ethics Questionnaire' for each code reviewed.

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### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

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Library resources, including Internet  
Copies of several professional Codes of Ethics (ex. AMA, ADA, nursing, physical therapy, dentistry, etc.).  
Nightingale Pledge  
Hippocratic Oath  
Code of ethics questionnaire.

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### **ASSESSMENT**

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Completion of 'Code of Ethics Questionnaire'

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### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

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For reinforcement, the student will identify an appropriate ethical response to a given clinical scenario. [You are employed as a medical office assistant. Your mother's friend asks you to find out for her how much her neighbor was charged for a medical procedure.]

For enrichment, the student will develop a Code of Ethics for students at school using available technologies.

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### **REFLECTIONS**

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## Code of Ethics Questionnaire

1. What do you consider to be the most important component of this particular professional Code of Ethics?
2. What component(s) do you disagree with? Why?
3. What information (language, phrasing, component of code, etc.) is unclear to you? Why?

### **Nightingale Pledge**

I solemnly pledge myself before God, and in the presence of this assembly, to pass my life in purity and to practice my profession faithfully.

I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous and will not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug.

I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession, and, will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my profession.

With loyalty will I endeavor to aid the physician in his work and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care.

**Hippocratic oath**, an oath, though to have come from Hippocrates, that serves as an ethical guide for the medical profession. It is traditionally part of the graduation ceremonies of medical colleges and reads as follows: I swear by Apollo the physician, by Esculapius, Hygeia, and Panacea, and I take to witness all the gods, and all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment the following Oath: To consider dear to me as my parents him who taught me this art; to live in common with him and if necessary to share my goods with him; to look upon his children as my own brothers, to teach them this art if they so desire without fee or written promise; to impart to my sons and the sons of the master who taught me and the disciples who have enrolled themselves and have agreed to the rules of the profession, but to these along, the precepts and the instruction. I will prescribe regimen for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone. To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug, nor give advice which may cause his death. Nor will I give a woman a pessary to procure abortion. But I will preserve the purity of my life and my art. I will not cut for stone, even for patients in who the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners (specialists in this art). In every house where I come I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing and all seduction, and especially from the pleasures of love with women or with men, be they free or slaves. All that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession or outside of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal. If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice my art, respected by all men and in all times; but if I swerve from it or violate it, may the reverse be my lot.