

American Society of Aerospace Medicine Specialists (ASAMS)

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Physicians have long held to a professional standard of behavior based on strict principles of beneficence (acting first and foremost for the primary benefit of individual patients) and confidentiality. Limitations of unconditional adherence to these principles are apparent when medical conditions (as alcohol dependence) threaten the survival of the patient and potentially many others, as in the case of mass transit operators. The public safety of transit systems is dependent upon the health and cognitive functioning of those in multiple domains. For example, for those involved in air travel, adequate health and cognitive functioning are required in aircraft design and manufacture, aircraft and airfield maintenance, operating navigation/information systems, air traffic control, passenger screening, health maintenance systems, in addition to the adequate health and cognitive functioning required to control aircraft onboard or remotely. Aeromedical specialists concentrate primarily on those most directly associated with flight: aviators themselves, those who remotely pilot aircraft, and air traffic controllers.

Medical decisions regarding an individual patient in an aviation-related enterprise can affect complex and interconnected interactions at multiple levels—including the safety of physicians themselves, who when flying or living under flight paths place their own lives in the hands of aviators. As a result, ethical guidance based on both ideals (*conditional* beneficence and confidentiality) AND consequences (societal safety) are required. Such ideals and sensitivity to potential consequences are, in turn, further shaped by the core values of relevant organizations (as businesses, government agencies and military departments) and individual medical practitioners.

ASAMS hereby establishes explicit standards to promote beneficence and confidentiality, as feasible, and to promote sensitivity to safety consequences, in order to assist members through the increasingly frequent circumstances of balancing their obligations to individual patients with their obligations to employers, governmental aeromedical authorities, and the public at large. ASAMS has adopted these Ethical Guidelines outlining responsible and honorable behavior by its members in fulfilling their professional responsibilities to patients, colleagues, employers and the public. Unethical or illegal physician behavior that comes to the attention of ASAMS will be subject to judgment about compliance with these standards by specialist peers, who will review all available evidence to investigate allegations of impropriety.

ASAMS members shall:

- I. Provide competent, professional, and scientifically sound medical services with compassion and respect for human dignity as well as the rights and privacy of their patients.
- II. Seek to fully identify individual biases and any situational or economic influences that impact aeromedical decision making to avoid conflicts of interest, and further consider fairly the rights and perspectives of all parties (clients, patients, employees, employers, governments, and the public) within the context of aerospace safety.
- III. Accord the highest priority to the health and safety of their patients while maintaining the highest standards of medical practice.
- IV. Respect the law and work within the community to safeguard the health and safety of their patients, their clients, affected populations and the overall public.
- V. Demonstrate a commitment to the development and maintenance of professional medical competence and personal scientific knowledge.
- VI. Behave honestly and in a professional manner at all times as befits all activities of a physician and bring to the attention of ASAMS those colleagues deficient in character or competence, who engage in fraud, deception, or other unethical behavior, or who suffer temperamental or medical impairments (including abusive personal practices, psychiatric illness and chemical dependency) which may interfere with one's ability to follow the above principles.

All ASAMS physicians are advised to review both the AMA and the AOA Codes of Ethics. ASAMS members are encouraged to seek peer advice whenever they find themselves in unclear, difficult or complex situations regarding medical decision making.