INTRODUCTION

For generations, the medical profession has followed a body of ethical statements developed for the benefit of the patient. A founding principle of the medical profession from the AMA Principles of Medical Ethics is:

*A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.*

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

As a physician, you must understand that your responsibilities are to:

- Patients
- Other Health Care Professionals
- Yourself
- Society

SYSTEMS THINKING

As a physician, you will face many ethical challenges including issues relating to telemedicine, health insurance, augmented intelligence and electronic health records.

**Telemedicine**
All physicians who participate in telemedicine have an ethical responsibility to meet patients’ health needs.

**Health Insurance**
Insurance coverage is a common source of ethical issues, particularly around the term “medical necessity.” There is debate about what interventions should be identified as medically necessary.

**Big Data**
An area of ethical concern is privacy. Given the capacity of "big data" to put together information from any online, electronic or virtual interaction, what are the proper limits of how this information should be put together and used?

**Electronic Health Records (EHRs)**
EHRs can challenge professionalism because they can demand the physician’s attention in ways that draw focus away from the patient.
THE FIDUCIARY NATURE OF THE PATIENT-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIP

- The word fiduciary is a legal term that is important for medical professionals to understand.
- Fiduciary relationships often concern money, but the word fiduciary does not, in and of itself, suggest financial matters.
- Rather, fiduciary applies to any situation in which one person justifiably places confidence and trust in someone else and seeks that person’s help or advice in some matter.
- This term is often used to describe a client’s trust in an attorney but by this definition, the relationship between a physician and a patient can also be described as fiduciary.

ETHICS AND THE LAW

- Conduct that is legally permissible may be ethically unacceptable.
- The fact that a physician who has been charged with allegedly illegal conduct has been acquitted or exonerated in criminal or civil proceedings does not mean that the physician acted ethically.
- The principles of medical ethics adopted by the American Medical Association are not laws, but standards of conduct that define honorable behavior for a physician.

Privacy
Privacy refers to the right of an individual to keep his or her health information private.

Confidentiality
Confidentiality refers to the duty of anyone entrusted with health information to keep that information private.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:
- Why is it important for me to consider and learn more about ethics in health care?
- How will systems-based practice affect my goal to put patients first?
- What part do I have in determining what is and is not ethical?
- How might I influence ethical behavior in my relationships with other health care professionals?