Sexual and Romantic Boundary Violations
Considerations from the AMA Code of Medical Ethics

Current Patients

• Romantic or sexual interactions between physicians and patients that occur concurrently with the patient-physician relationship are unethical.

• A physician must terminate the patient-physician relationship before initiating a dating, romantic, or sexual relationship with a patient.

• A physician should avoid nonsexual, nonclinical contact with a patient if he or she has reason to believe it may be perceived as or lead to romantic or sexual contact.

Former Patients

• Sexual or romantic relationships with former patients are unethical if the physician uses or exploits trust, knowledge, emotions, or influence derived from the previous professional relationship, or if a romantic relationship would otherwise foreseeably harm the individual.

Key Third Parties

may be spouses or partners, parents, guardians, or surrogates of a current patient

• Before initiating a relationship with a key third party, physicians should take into account:

  • The nature of the patient’s medical problem and the likely effect on patient care.

  • The length of the professional relationship.

  • The degree of the third party’s emotional dependence on the physician.

  • The importance of the clinical encounter to the third party and the patient.

  • Whether the patient-physician relationship can be terminated in keeping with ethics guidance and what implications doing so would have for patient.

Supervisors and Trainees

• Sexual harassment in the practice of medicine is unethical.

• Sexual relationships between medical supervisors and trainees are not acceptable, even if consensual. The supervisory role should be eliminated if the parties wish to pursue their relationship.

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