

The Oath the Guides Our Doctors

which is still not a law

How is it that we trust our lives with individuals that we barely know?

These individuals are doctors, nurses and surgeons that live within us and have mastered the craft of medicine to save lives and treat people.



The profession of physicians and medicine can be traced as far back to the 4th millennium bce. With medical traditions emerging from all around the world like Babilon, China, Egypt and India. All these years of evolution and renewal has slightly altered the field of medication but there are many important points that still correlate with the past today.

For many, an oath seems like a silly and fragile procedure but in the profession of physicians this oath is the single promise that maintains their humanity and guides them ethically.

The Hippocrates oath, which is named after the father of western medicine includes many pledges like "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgement, but never with a view to injury or wrongdoing". Hippocrates of Kos was a Greek physician that dedicated his life to the field of medicine and inspired many others after him to advance in the field.

His oath is the basis of its modernized version written by Louis Lasagna in 1964, which later pledged to be more widely accepted and socially fit. The oath was first adopted by the General assembly of the world medical association in 1948 and later amended in 1968.

It was primarily drafted due to the unimaginable human rights violations by Nazi physicians which experimented with radiation, vaccines, untested drugs on whoever they liked. They also performed unnecessary surgeries which further exploited those held in concentration camps. These events from the past further highlighted the need for stricter rules and ethics and hoped to closely link humanity with the profession of medicine.



Some of the main points in the pledge include:

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- *solemnly pledge to consecrate my life to the service of humanity . . .*
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- *I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity;*
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- *The health of my patient will be my first consideration;*
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- *I will respect the secrets that are confided in me . . .*
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- *I will not permit considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene between my duty and my patient;*
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- *I will maintain the utmost respect for human life;*
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- *I will not use my medical knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties, even under threat*
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This oath may seem somewhat irrelevant but lays the basic guideline for physicians. The oath and code of conduct work together to regulate the ethics in the profession of medicine and maintain its dignity and values.

When its key points are violated it leads to medical malpractice, things like, failure to diagnosis, misdiagnose disease of medical condition and unreasonable delay in treatment. Selective treatment of patients or discrimination against patients and failure to provide right treatment. There is also the chance of patient's confidentiality being violated.

The violation of the oath holds no real punishments as it is expected to be followed by doctors. Though it can lead to civil lawsuits and complaints being filed against the doctor. Often, a complaint is filed to the doctor and compensation is done to deal with the issue and case rarely goes past magistrate courts. But as discussed earlier violation to the oath leads to serious ethical problems and should be dealt with more authority. The violation of these basic ethics in medicine not only harms the patients and weakens their trust in the medical fraternity. But also violates human rights. The patients that are victims of these violations are left with lifelong financial issues along with physical and emotional injury therefore issues related to the disturbance of this oath should be taken more seriously. According to a *serious ethical violation* report by Am J Bioeth, all cases of ethical violations involve intentional wrongdoing 97 percent of the time and selfish motive for money or sex 90 percent of the time.

In the 21st century many of the pledges included in the oath are easily broken by doctors. We see these healthcare professionals getting blinded by greed and neglect their service to many. An alarming example of this is the large health gap between non-aboriginal Australians and aboriginal Australians that exists in our nation today. Another example of greed hindering doctors ethical reasoning is Doctor Glaser who performed at least 90 unnecessary surgeries for own economic needs. He obsessively performed on patients 18 to 21 hours a day and complaints against him were ignored. Shockingly, according to the *a serious ethical violation* report ethical violations are rarely reported as patients feel discouraged and have no expectations for punishment. This further highlights the need to establish laws that guarantee punishment for disturbing the ethical promises made in the oath.

My suggestion to regulate doctor's behaviour and guide their practise within ethical guidelines is to bind doctors to the oath. In Australia, laws directly related to the oath should be introduced to underline its importance as an ethical template for all physicians. There should be actual expectations and punishments related to the oath and it should be included in the medical code of ethics as well.

This oath acts like the template that guides doctors and should be given more importance by being legalised.



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