

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON ETHICAL AND JUDICIAL AFFAIRS*

CEJA Opinion 2-JUN-21

Subject: Amendment to Opinion 8.7, “Routine Universal Immunization of Physicians”

Presented by: Monique A. Spillman, MD, Chair

1 INTRODUCTION

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At the November 2020 Special Meeting, the American Medical Association House of Delegates adopted the recommendations of Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs Report 2, November 2020, “Amendment to Opinion 8.7, ‘Routine Universal Immunization of Physicians.’” The Council issues this Opinion, which will appear in the next version of AMA PolicyFinder and the next print edition of the *Code of Medical Ethics*.

E-8.7 – Routine Universal Immunization of Physicians

As professionals committed to promoting the welfare of individual patients and the health of the public and to safeguarding their own and their colleagues’ well-being, physicians have an ethical responsibility to encourage patients to accept immunization when the patient can do so safely, and to take appropriate measures in their own practice to prevent the spread of infectious disease in health care settings. Conscientious participation in routine infection control practices, such as hand washing and respiratory precautions is a basic expectation of the profession. In some situations, however, routine infection control is not sufficient to protect the interests of patients, the public, and fellow health care workers.

In the context of a highly transmissible disease that poses significant medical risk for vulnerable patients or colleagues, or threatens the availability of the health care workforce, particularly a disease that has potential to become epidemic or pandemic, and for which there is an available, safe, and effective vaccine, physicians have a responsibility to accept immunization absent a recognized medical contraindication or when a specific vaccine would pose a significant risk to the physician’s patients.

Physicians who are not or cannot be immunized have a responsibility to voluntarily take appropriate action to protect patients, fellow health care workers and others. They must adjust their practice activities in keeping with decisions of the medical staff, institutional policy, or public health policy, including refraining from direct patient contact when appropriate.

Physician practices and health care institutions have a responsibility to proactively develop policies and procedures for responding to epidemic or pandemic disease with input from

* Opinions of the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs will be placed on the Consent Calendar for informational reports, but may be withdrawn from the Consent Calendar on motion of any member of the House of Delegates and referred to a Reference Committee. The members of the House may discuss an Opinion fully in Reference Committee and on the floor of the House. After concluding its discussion, the House shall file the Opinion. The House may adopt a resolution requesting the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs to reconsider or withdraw the Opinion.

1 practicing physicians, institutional leadership, and appropriate specialists. Such policies and
2 procedures should include robust infection control practices, provision and required use of
3 appropriate protective equipment, and a process for making appropriate immunization readily
4 available to staff. During outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease for which there is a safe,
5 effective vaccine, institutions' responsibility may extend to requiring immunization of staff.
6 Physician practices and health care institutions have a further responsibility to limit patient and
7 staff exposure to individuals who are not immunized, which may include requiring
8 unimmunized individuals to refrain from direct patient contact. (I, II)