

Virtual Mentor

American Medical Association Journal of Ethics
August 2011, Volume 13, Number 8: 550.

THE CODE SAYS

The AMA *Code of Medical Ethics*' Opinion on Physicians' Duty to the Poor

Opinion 9.065 - Caring for the Poor

Each physician has an obligation to share in providing care to the indigent. The measure of what constitutes an appropriate contribution may vary with circumstances such as community characteristics, geographic location, the nature of the physician's practice and specialty, and other conditions. All physicians should work to ensure that the needs of the poor in their communities are met. Caring for the poor should be a regular part of the physician's practice schedule.

In the poorest communities, it may not be possible to meet the needs of the indigent for physicians' services by relying solely on local physicians. The local physicians should be able to turn for assistance to their colleagues in prosperous communities, particularly those in close proximity.

Physicians are meeting their obligation, and are encouraged to continue to do so, in a number of ways such as seeing indigent patients in their offices at no cost or at reduced cost, serving at freestanding or hospital clinics that treat the poor, and participating in government programs that provide health care to the poor. Physicians can also volunteer their services at weekend clinics for the poor and at shelters for battered women or the homeless.

In addition to meeting their obligation to care for the indigent, physicians can devote their energy, knowledge, and prestige to designing and lobbying at all levels for better programs to provide care for the poor.

Issued June 1994, based on the report "[Caring for the Poor](#)," adopted December 1992.

Related in VM

[Learning to Care for the Underserved—Making the Most of Opportunities in Medical School](#), August 2011

[Patient Advocacy for Beginners](#), August 2011

[Medical-Legal Partnerships](#), August 2011

Copyright 2011 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.