

Episode: *Author Interview: “What Are Organizations’ Responsibilities When Surgeons Experience Regret?”*

Guest: Amy E. Vertrees, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Amy E. Vertrees, the founder of and a surgeon at Columbia Surgical Partners in Columbia, Tennessee. She’s here to discuss her article, coauthored with Dr Matthew R. Endara, “*What Are Organizations’ Responsibilities When Surgeons Experience Regret?*,” in the March 2025 issue of the Journal, [Regret in the Moral Psychology of Surgical Professionalism](#). Dr Vertrees, thank you so much for being here.

DR AMY VERTREES: Thank you so much for the honor of both allowing me to publish the article as well as the talk today. [music fades]

[00:00:51] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you and Dr Endara are making in this article?

VERTREES: The main thing that I wanted to, that we wanted to talk about in our article was about regret, because as physicians, we all go with the patient’s best interest in mind. We want to do the best for our patients. And what we find is that over time, as we start interacting with the business of medicine, that we’re actually unable to do so. We want to do the best for our patients. But what happens, too, is that we’re also kind of fighting to get reimbursed and fighting to get paid as well. And people don’t really like for physicians to talk about that aspect of it, but at some point, we want to make sure that we are also being appreciated for what we do. So there’s a bit of a conflict of interest in all of that.

[00:01:42] HOFF: And what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to be taking from your article?

VERTREES: I think that to be aware of what’s out there. Because I think when we go to school, we learn all the information, we get the experience that we need, we are now the best possible physicians that we could be. But when you enter the business of medicine, you have to have more education about the environment around you, that you’re going to have some competing interests about being able to take care of patients adequately, that we’re going to also be fighting for our lifestyle. And I think it’s reasonable for us to consider our lifestyle. And what they have to do is learn a different skill set, which is a completely different environment. And I think a lot of times we’re being trained to just do as we’re told, but I think that we need to stand up for

ourselves a little bit more and be aware of all of the competing interests that are going on in medicine.

[00:02:48] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

VERTREES: What's happened is that people are starting to become aware of, like, the man behind the curtain: insurance companies and some of the business aspects. And we need to be aware of this as well, just so we can be a part of the conversation. Most recently, there was an insurance company who said they were going to stop paying for a certain amount of anesthesia for a case, and a lot of people banded together. A lot of physicians banded together and really used their voice and said, this is not right for patients. We deserve to be paid, and the patients deserve to have as much anesthesia as required based on our expertise. So I think that event is just showing us that continuing our education in the different format of what's going on is going to be most helpful, because it's just information that we haven't learned in medical school and residency, which is definitely been a mission of mine, is to learn, you know, teach those lessons not taught in residency. [theme music returns]

[00:03:53] HOFF: Dr Vertrees, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

VERTREES: Thank you so much. I really appreciate this.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.