

Virtual Mentor

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CASE AND COMMENTARY

Ethics of Professional Courtesy

Commentary by Kayhan Parsi, JD, PhD

Case

Dr. Friendly has been practicing pediatrics in a small city for twenty years. He has several colleagues whom he considers good friends. Recently, Dr. Friendly treated the daughter of one of his colleagues. Instead of billing for the procedure, Dr. Friendly waived his normal fee. The patient's mother, Dr. Newcomb, practices internal medicine and feels uneasy about not paying for the procedure through her insurance company. She does not want to hurt Dr. Friendly's feelings, but she thinks that professional courtesy is not required and is ethically questionable. Dr. Friendly sees it differently; he believes that the origins of professional courtesy go back as far as the Hippocratic Oath. In his opinion, professional courtesy helps in a small way to repay the debt he's incurred in learning from teachers and colleagues in medicine. Moreover, he believes that professional courtesy is something that is frequently extended in other fields; why should physicians be excluded?

What do you think?

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in:

Opinion 6.12 Forgiveness or waiver of insurance co-payments. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

Opinion 6.13 Professional courtesy. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

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