

Episode: Author Interview: “AMA Code of Medical Ethics’ *Opinions Related to Clinicians in Government*”

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[bright theme music]

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 Scott Schweikart, a senior policy analyst at the American Medical Association in Chicago, Illinois, where he is also the legal editor for the *AMA Journal of Ethics*. He’s here to discuss his article, “AMA Code of Medical Ethics’ *Opinions Related to Clinicians in Government*,” in the March 2023 issue of the Journal, [Clinicians in Government](#). Scott, thanks so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

SCOTT SCHWEIKART: Hi, thank you. Thanks for having me.

HOFF: So, what’s the main ethics point of this article?

SCHWEIKART: I think the main ethics point is that this article is really just a short kind of introduction to what other parts of the code, what parts of the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics* are relevant to physicians who are working in government. And it’s really just reminding physicians, if you’re working in government, there are still some guidelines that might not be so obvious outside traditional guidelines in clinical practice like informed consent.

So, for instance, one opinion, we have Opinion 10.1, which is ethics guidance for physicians in non-clinical roles. So, this would be an example of a physician who’s a politician, for example. They’re just outside the clinical role. And so, what’s interesting, so the code says in this instance, even when they fulfill roles that do not involve directly providing care for patients in clinical settings, physicians are seen by patients in the public, as well as their colleagues and coworkers, as professionals who have committed themselves to the values and norms of medicine. And the opinion further notes that physicians use the knowledge and values they gain through medical training and practice in their other non-clinical roles. They are still functioning within the sphere of their profession and are hence still obligated to uphold key ethical and fiduciary duties. So, that’s just really a key, I think that’s a really key example of just seeing how even when you’re outside of your traditional role, you still have to kind of think about your broader professional standing as a physician and how that still is going to carry obligations in other spheres of life, such as to say if you were a politician.

HOFF: So, what's the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from this article specifically?

SCHWEIKART: I think one of the most important things to think about is that lots of times, to think about that some of your ethical responsibilities can bleed over outside of the clinical role. So, for example, physicians, sometimes if they're not acting as physicians, they still need to be mindful of their kind of their authority and how that can carry over into other spheres of their life, even if it's not clinical. And so, that's one thing I would just maybe have the trainees and students be mindful of, is that some of these professional obligations of being a physician can sometimes be quite broad and can carry over into other spheres of their life.

HOFF: And if you could add a point to this article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

SCHWEIKART: I would just say, especially for trainees and young physicians, be mindful that even when you're outside of the clinical day-to-day practice, you still are representing the profession and still have these broader professional duties. And I would just also remind physicians that we have the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics* here that is offering this guidance, especially in these, you know, and offering this broad guidance in ways that may not be intuitive. So, I would definitely recommend physicians and physicians-in-training to check out the code. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Listeners can find an updated digital version of the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics* at AMAethicsCode.org. Scott, thanks so much for being on the podcast and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SCHWEIKART: Great. No problem. Thanks for having me.

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*.