

Physicians Ethics Survey

**> 10,000 Physicians
Medscape 2010**

Physician Respondent Breakdown by Specialty

Family Medicine_____	14.7%	Urology_____	2.0%
Internal Medicine_____	12.4%	Nephrology_____	1.7%
Pediatrics_____	10.7%	Gastroenterology_____	1.6%
OB/GYN & Women's Health_____	6.3%	Pulmonary Medicine_____	1.6%
Psychiatry/Mental Health_____	6.1%	Pathology_____	1.5%
Emergency Medicine__	5.2%	Endocrinology_____	1.4%
Surgery_____	4.6%	Pain Management____	1.2%
Oncology_____	3.4%	Critical Care Medicine__	1.1%
Ophthalmology_____	3.4%	Infectious Disease____	1.1%
Anesthesiology_____	2.3%	Neonatal/Perinatal Medicine_____	1.1%
Radiology_____	2.3%	Rheumatology_____	1.0%
Neurology_____	2.2%	Other Specialties*____	6.7%
Orthopaedics_____	2.2%		



Is it ever acceptable to break patient confidentiality if you know that a patient's health status may be harming others?

Yes - 53.2%

No - 20.2%

It depends - 26.6%



Would you ever discuss patient information in situations that did not fully protect their privacy, eg, socially or while talking with doctors about subjects not related to the patient?

Yes - 8.4%

No - 77.4%

It depends - 14.2%



Would you ever hide information from a patient about a terminal or preterminal diagnosis in an effort to bolster their spirit or attitude?

Yes, I soften it and give hope even if there's little chance - 14.6%

Yes, unless someone is going to die imminently, I don't tell them how bad it is - 1.7%

No, I tell it exactly as I see it - 59.8%

It depends - 23.8%



Is it acceptable to perform a procedure that isn't medically warranted, for reasons of defensive medicine?

Yes - 16.1%

No - 61.3%

It depends - 22.7%



Would you ever prescribe a treatment that was a placebo, simply because the patient wanted treatment?

Yes - 23.5%

No - 58.3%

It depends - 18.2%



Would you refer a patient to a physician simply to return a favor to the doctor, when you didn't think that person was the best qualified?

Yes - 2.4%

No - 92.4%

It depends - 5.2%



If a physician friend or colleague were impaired (alcohol, drugs, or illness) or was no longer competent, and he or she ignored your warnings to get help, would you report that person to a superior or to the state medical board?

Yes - 86.2%

No - 2.3%

It depends - 11.6%



Is it ever acceptable to overstate or falsify a patient's condition when submitting claims or seeking prior authorization?

Yes, in order to get a patient the services, such as drugs, treatment, or hospital coverage
- 17.1%

Yes, in order to bring in more revenue - 0.2%

No - 73.2%

It depends - 9.4%



Would you feel conflicted about dropping insurers that don't pay well, even though some longtime patients would probably stop seeing you?

Yes - 57.0%

No - 26.5%

It depends - 16.5%



Would you ever “fire” a “non-compliant” patient so that you could improve your pay-for-performance (P4P) scores or to stop dealing with patients who “overuse” resources on their capitation plans?

Yes - 9.0%

No - 78.9%

It depends - 12.1%



Are there times when it's acceptable to cover up or avoid revealing a mistake if that mistake would not cause harm to the patient?

Yes - 19.0%

No - 60.1%

It depends - 20.9%



Are there times when it's acceptable to cover up or avoid revealing a mistake if that mistake would potentially or likely harm the patient?

Yes - 1.6%

No - 94.9%

It depends - 3.5%



Would you ever undertreat a patient's pain because you were concerned about repercussions or because you believe that a patient -- even a terminal patient -- might become addicted?

Yes - 5.6%

No - 84.1%

It depends - 10.3%



Would you ever recommend or give life-sustaining therapy when you judged that it was futile?

Yes - 23.6%

No - 37.0%

It depends - 39.4%



Would you ever consider halting life-sustaining therapy because of family demands, even if you felt that it was premature?

Yes - 16.3%

No - 54.5%

It depends - 29.2%



**Should physician-assisted
suicide be allowed in some
situations?**

Yes - 45.8%

No - 40.7%

It depends - 13.5%



Would you agree that you should refuse gifts or perks from pharmaceutical companies because they may influence your medical judgment?

Yes - 46.8%

No - 36.8%

It depends - 16.4%



Could you become involved in a romantic or sexual relationship with a patient?

Yes, while that patient is still a patient - 0.8%

Yes, but not until at least 6 months after they stopped being a patient - 11.7%

No - 83.1%

It depends - 4.5%



Should it be legal for people to buy organs for transplant, if they would not be able to receive an organ by waiting their turn through the national database?

Yes - 19.9%

No - 66.5%

It depends - 13.6%



**Would you perform an abortion
in certain situations, even if it
were against your own beliefs?**

Yes – 34.1%

No – 53.5%

It depends – 12.4%



What was your biggest ethical dilemma?

What was your biggest ethical dilemma?

1. Reporting an incompetent or impaired colleague
2. Owning up after making a medical error
3. Physician/patient confidentiality when one half of a couple is HIV positive and the other half doesn't know
4. Prolonging futile care for a dying patient

What was your biggest ethical dilemma?

5. Denying care to a nonpaying patient
6. Whether to honor a family's request not to tell a relative that he/she has a terminal illness
7. Exaggerating a patient's condition to get insurance coverage
8. Writing a prescription for a family member or friend

2010 Medscape Physicians Ethics Survey

▶ http://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/public/ethical-dilemmas?src=nl_slide&uac=41758MY

▶ **Author**

Leslie Kane, MA
Editorial Director
Medscape Business of Medicine
New York, NY

Disclosure: Leslie Kane, MA, has disclosed no relevant financial relationships.