



Patient's Right of Conscience

Respect for conscientiously held beliefs of individuals and for individual differences is an essential aspect of our free society. In the words of Thomas Jefferson: "No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority."

In healthcare the right of choice of moral refusal is foundational and applies to all participants, including patients and healthcare professionals. Healthcare by its nature cannot be morally neutral, as it is actively concerned with human health and need. Issues of conscience arise when a proposed medical or surgical intervention conflicts with the deeply held personal beliefs and values of the patient or the healthcare professional. AAME believes that in such circumstances Rights of Conscience have priority.

The Patient's Right of Conscience:

- The right of patients with decisional capacity, on the basis of conscience, to refuse treatment, even when such refusal would likely bring harm to themselves, should be respected.
- The right of patients, on the basis of conscience, to refuse treatment, when such refusal would likely threaten the health and/or life of others, should be resisted and should become a matter of public interest and responsibility.
- The right of a healthcare surrogate, for example, the parent of a minor, on the basis of conscience, to refuse treatment, thereby threatening the health and/or life of another, should be resisted and should become a matter of public interest and responsibility.

Bibliography

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