



## CMDA Public Policy Statement on Duty to Care in Relation to Vaccine Choice

20 April 2022

Vaccination to decrease the risk of severe symptoms and death related to SARS-CoV-2 virus has been available for more than a year in the United States. Many adult Americans have chosen to remain unvaccinated. All people, vaccinated or unvaccinated, are potential patients in the health care system. What is the responsibility of health care professionals in the care of patients regardless of vaccination status?

The Judeo-Christian tradition views all persons as created equal and therefore equally deserving of our care and respect (Genesis 1:27; Mark 12:31; Phil 2:4; Eph 2:10). The extent of our care should always be based on the patient's need (Luke 10:25-37). It should not be based on who they are, what they have done, how much money they have, what role they play in society, or their vaccination decision.

Ethical Considerations include

**Justice:** In medicine, our most fundamental sense of justice motivates us to treat people according to their medical needs, not according to their merits, or what someone thinks they deserve based on a social criterion. When we treat people according to their medical needs, we do not withhold appropriate treatment because of someone's past actions, behaviors, or decisions.

We do not deny care to patients who decline to follow healthy eating habits, who drink too much alcohol, use illegal drugs, smoke cigarettes, or choose not to exercise: a large swath of our society. We do not discriminate. We receive these patients in their time of need and try to help them as best we can. Neither should we discriminate against those persons based on their COVID-19 vaccination status.

**Respect for persons:** It is appropriate to encourage patients to follow healthy habits, and make recommendations about treatments that we think are good for patients' health. It is inappropriate to force a medical intervention onto a patient who has decision-making capacity.

The ability of a patient to refuse a medical intervention is a basic liberty we should all respect. This respects patients as persons, rather than treating them as mere bodies. Caring for patients as persons means respecting their dignity, their conscience, and their freedom to make decisions that they think are best for them – even when we think the decisions will bring them harm. In healthcare we should focus on giving patients information and making good recommendations, and at times we should also attempt

respectfully to persuade our patients. But we should never manipulate or coerce. This respect for patients as persons, for their freedom as persons, is at the heart of informed consent.

#### Scripture References:

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (ESV)

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Luke 10: 25-37

<sup>25</sup>And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup>And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>And the next day he took out two denarii<sup>[a]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" <sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."