

Unionization

The Patient – Doctor relationship today is subjected to unprecedented pressures. These include economic strategies by third-party payers and employers, increasing regulation by governmental agencies, and the bureaucratization of medicine itself.

Unions are proposed by some as a mechanism to provide doctors with a unified voice for expression of concerns and grievances, with a more powerful vehicle for self-representation, and for increased leverage in negotiations to improve patient care.

However, unionization of medical professionals is an ethically dubious strategy for addressing these issues because some strategies of unionization conflict* with the needs of patients, and erode medicine's foundational principles.

- The traditional mechanisms by which unions ultimately protest – work stoppage or slowdown – jeopardize patient care.
- Historically, the effects of unionization have conflicted with and diminished the spirit of self-sacrifice characteristic of medicine as a calling.
- Action taken by doctors in protest or strike – especially to negotiate monetary reward for the practice of medicine and dentistry – could be perceived by the public as self-serving, and could violate the covenant relationship inherent in our calling.
- Christians are called to emulate the self-sacrificing life of Christ; to obey legitimately governing authorities; and to serve God, not money. Unions tend to re-direct even Christian doctors' professional priorities away from these values.

While there are legitimate concerns which drive the unionization movement, we urge that doctors use means other than unionization to resolve those concerns.

*See Conflict of Interest Statement passed by House of Delegates in 1994.

*Passed by the House of Delegates
52 approvals, 2 abstentions.
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