

Speaking for Ourselves

A revised Hippocratic Oath for Indian medical students

SANJAY A. PAI, SUNIL K. PANDYA

The Hippocratic Oath is taken by many medical students on graduation. Indeed, it is one aspect of medicine that many laymen are aware of.

There is a large amount of literature on the Hippocratic Oath. This includes articles on its history¹ and on modern alterations of the oath.²⁻⁴ The relevance of the oath has been questioned while, equally, there have been articles which emphatically argue for its continued use.^{5,6} At least one personal oath is available,⁷ while someone has mooted a pan-professional oath for all health carers.⁸ Finally, a poetic version of the oath also exists.⁹

Most of the literature on the Hippocratic Oath, particularly its modern versions, is from the West. We have, therefore, written a modified Hippocratic Oath for Indian medical students. Among the things that we have emphasized are issues of importance today or factors that are unique to India. These include the pharmaceutical nexus, cross-practice and cut practice. Two issues that we have not addressed are euthanasia and abortion—because one is against the law and the other, like the first, is a subject on which it is impossible to offer an oath which is acceptable to all.

We hope readers find this revised oath useful and we look forward to comments and suggestions for its improvement.

THE OATH

On this day, as I graduate as a physician, I take this oath. I shall practise the art and science of medicine honestly, sincerely and to the best of my ability and judgement. I understand the responsibility that the profession entails. The patient's welfare will be central to all my activities. I shall honour the rich heritage of ethics that we have inherited from Charaka, Sushruta and other great Indian teachers of the past.

I shall do my best to participate in all three facets of medical practice: care of patients, research and teaching.

Care of patients

I will care for my patients in a scientific and ethical manner. I will provide the best of care to all my patients without any consideration of their religion, caste, personal beliefs or socioeconomic status. In those patients where cure is impossible, I shall attempt to relieve pain and suffering. I will continue to offer my care and concern to the end. Above all, I will do nothing that may harm the patient.

Medical science keeps improving and learning is a life-long process. I shall continue reading learned journals and attend continuing education programmes. I will do my best to be

conversant with recent advances and new thinking in medicine. Thus will I keep improving the care of my patients.

I shall respect and maintain my patients' secrets. Where required, with the patient's permission, I shall also take into confidence the family, so that my patient gets the best treatment possible. There will be occasions when, in the greater interests of society, I am required by law to divulge confidential information. I will do all I can to ensure that my patient's interests are protected and that the need for making confidential information public is known to my patient.

I will not perform needless investigations or procedures that are unlikely to benefit my patient. I neither expect nor will I accept payment from my colleagues, laboratories, imaging institutes or any other organization, offered as commission or share of their income.

I shall practice only the specialty in which I have training. I am aware of my limitations. There will be times when my patient needs the help of someone wiser, more knowledgeable or skilled. I shall have no hesitation in requesting such help. Should the patient request a second opinion, I will help in obtaining it.

I shall restrict my practice to modern medicine, in which I have been trained. I shall not use drugs or preparations from other branches of medicine unless I am trained in their use and am certified to use them.

Research

My research will depend on my circumstances but my enquiring spirit will search for problems, the solutions to which will benefit patients.

Just as I would not like to be treated as a guinea pig, I will ensure that my patients participate in my studies as well-informed individuals, fully conversant with the purpose of the enquiry, the questions asked, answers sought and how these may benefit others. All my dealings will be honest and transparent.

Teaching

I shall endeavour to teach my younger or less experienced colleagues what I have learnt in medicine.

I will do my best to pass on the fruits of my education and experience to my patients and to my colleagues through the media, and papers presented at conferences and published in medical journals.

Miscellaneous

Whilst I understand the need for drug companies to market their products, I shall not make myself their tool and shall be careful not to allow my judgement to be affected by their sales tactics. My dealings with their representatives will be courteous but transparent.

Because healthcare often involves multiple professions, including insurance companies and other agencies, I shall interact with the members of other related professions in a correct manner

Columbia Asia Referral Hospital, Malleswaram, Bangalore 560055, Karnataka, India

SANJAY A. PAI Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai 400026, Maharashtra, India

SUNIL K. PANDYA Department of Neurosurgery

Correspondence to SANJAY A. PAI; sanjayapai@gmail.com

© The National Medical Journal of India 2010

such that the care of the patient is not compromised in any way.

I believe that my work will speak for itself. Advertisement in any manner is beneath the dignity of my profession.

In keeping with Indian tradition, I will continue to respect and be grateful to all my teachers. I shall treat all my colleagues with courtesy.

I cherish the wisdom in the teaching that lies in the Golden Rule. I will do for my patient everything I would expect my doctor to do for me, were I the patient.

REFERENCES

1 Davey LM. The oath of Hippocrates: An historical review. *Neurosurgery* 2001;**49**: 554-66.

- 2 Robin ED, McCauley RF. Cultural lag and the Hippocratic Oath. *Lancet* 1995;**345**: 1422-24.
- 3 Marketos SG, Diamandopoulos AA, Bartsocas CS, Poulakou-Rebelakou E, Koutras DA. The Hippocratic Oath. *Lancet* 1996;**347**:101-2.
- 4 McHugh PR. Hippocrates à la mode. *Nat Med* 1996;**2**:507-9.
- 5 Graham D. Revisiting Hippocrates: Does an oath really matter? *JAMA* 2000;**284**: 2841-2.
- 6 Pellegrino ED. Medical commencement oaths: Shards of a fractured myth, or seeds of hope against a dispiriting future? *Med J Australia* 2002;**176**:99.
- 7 Crawshaw R. A physician's oath for self-insight. *Ann Int Med* 1979;**91**:648.
- 8 Hurwitz B, Richardson R. Swearing to care: The resurgence in medical oaths. *BMJ* 1997;**315**:1671-4.
- 9 Philipp R, Hart D. An ethical code for everybody in health care: Hippocratic Oath translated into poetry. *BMJ* 1998;**316**:1460.

Attention Subscribers

The subscriptions for *The National Medical Journal of India* are being serviced from the following address:

The Subscription Department
The National Medical Journal of India
 All India Institute of Medical Sciences
 Ansari Nagar
 New Delhi 110029

The subscription rates of the journal are as follows:

	One year	Two years	Three years	Five years
Indian	₹600	₹1100	₹1600	₹2600
Overseas	US\$ 85	US\$ 150	US\$ 220	US\$ 365

Personal subscriptions paid from personal funds are available at 50% discounted rates.

Please send all renewals and new subscriptions along with the payment to the above address. Cheques/Demand Draft should be made payable to **The National Medical Journal of India**. Please add ₹75 for outstation cheques.

If you wish to receive the Journal by registered post, please add ₹90 per annum to the total payment and make the request at the time of subscribing.