

# NATIONAL ETHICAL CODE FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS



# PREAMBLE

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When clinical practice begins, we, as medical students, are confronted with human life and obliged to know how to deal with what is subjacent to it.

Despite not required to follow the Deontological Medical Code, during our education in the clinical context, we ought to demonstrate suitable standards of conduct towards the Patient.

This Ethical Code intends to be extended to a National level, and it was thought for by Students and for Students, with the purpose of creating a uniform conduct code for all Portuguese Medical Schools, without prejudice to the existing Ethical Codes and bylaws.

It is intended to be a set of recommendations that can be consulted by the Students before beginning their journey through the clinical setting.

This Ethical Code is integrated in the +humanos project, created by the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Peace of ANEM/PortMSIC. It was built because we believe that Medical Education should not only be directed to the technical and scientific components but also to the increasing concern on the development of the humanistic features inherent to healthcare professionals.

We aim to make the Ethical Code available in a digital format, in the ANEM/PortMSIC website, so that it can be consulted by all Medical Students. Furthermore, it should be handed out to the Students who participate in the White Coat Ceremony of each Portuguese Medical School.

# PORTUGUESE ETHICAL CODE

1. General Principles
2. Duties and Limitations of a Medical Student
3. Relationship between the Medical Student and the Patient
4. Relationship with Healthcare Professionals
5. Free and Informed Consent
6. Medical Confidentiality and Patient's Privacy

## 1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

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The Student must recognise the privilege and responsibility that are intrinsic to a degree in Medicine, more specifically during the clinical practice years, when dealing with Patients.

First, the Student must have access to high-quality education, as well as being respected and safeguarded in his or her status as a Student throughout the clinical practice.

During the course of the programme, the Student must have an ethical conduct underlying what is expected from a Medicine Student and from a future Physician.

The Student's clinical practice must be based on the Fundamental Ethical Principles of Integrity, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence, Autonomy, Justice and Responsibility while considering the Patient as a free person.

## 2. DUTIES AND LIMITATIONS OF A MEDICINE STUDENT

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The Medical Student must respect the General Duties and Limitations of a University Student, without prejudice to the existing Ethical Codes and bylaws. Nevertheless, there are certain specificities of the degree in Medicine that are important to be clarified regarding his or her Duties and Limitations.

### DUTIES

1. Respect human life and dignity.
2. Recognise the Patient as a vulnerable and free individual in the condition of Human Being.
3. Act on the Patient without any kind of discrimination.
4. Consider the Doctor-Patient relationship as a learning environment and skills development opportunity, giving primacy to the acknowledgement of the Patient as a Human Being who is suffering, respecting the Patient above all.
5. Respect the Patient when supporting their Autonomy.
6. Recognise the right of the Patient to put forward suggestions and complaints, by him or herself or by his or her legal representative.
7. Respect the Patient's privacy and underlying confidentiality, in each and every moment of the Student-Patient Relationship.
8. Keep informed and up to date with regards to the curricular year of medical education.
9. Respect the Healthcare institutions' own regulation when attending to a clerkship.
10. Respect the human cadaver and the cadaverous parts as former

human entities, valuing their donation to education.

## LIMITATIONS

1. Students should only perform clinical actions they are familiar with and qualified to complete.

2. Whenever the Patient and/or the Family ask for advice that is beyond the Student's competence, the apprentice must inform the tutoring physician or any other Healthcare professional capable of responding to the situation.

3. The Student cannot issue prescriptions or medical certificates.

4. The Student must be aware that he or she cannot provide any information known to him/her in result of the internship or clinical training to the Patient, family or caregiver.

## 3. MEDICAL STUDENT - PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

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1. The medical Student must present him or herself as a Student, stating his name and his curricular year.

2. The Student must recognize every human being as a single individual and consider age, gender, sociocultural context, sexual orientation, religion, philosophical or ideological beliefs without ever discriminate.

3. The Student cannot, under any circumstance, reveal the diagnosis, prognosis or complementary diagnostic outcomes of the Patient. Once the Patients holds the rights to access the data registered in his or her

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clinical process, the Student must alert the physician or the tutor, in case the Patient expresses the need to be informed about his or her health situation or medical services available.

4. The Student must pay attention to the Patient, register any complaints, understand and respect the anxieties of the Patient, helping to deconstruct preconceived ideas or myths, within his or her knowledge.

5. The Student must play an active role in defending the Patient's interests, informing his or her tutor about any situations which may endanger the physical, psychological and/or emotional well-being of the Patient.

6. The Student must respect the Patient's health status, not being allowed to interfere with the preventive, curative, rehabilitative or terminal care that is being provided, except when permission from the tutor is obtained.

## 4. RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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1. The Student should be familiar with the organization of each ward, respecting each professional belonging to the team.

2. The Student should, whenever necessary, ask for help and enlightenment in any task to be done.

3. The Student must respect his colleagues, regardless of their age, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation and beliefs.

4. The Student should maintain a professional attitude whilst being

kind and friendly with colleagues and health professionals.

## 5. FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT

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1. The Student must introduce him or herself to the Patient and request for consent for any clinical act, after permission is granted from the tutor. When the patient is not capable of such consent, this must be secured from the patient's legal representative.
2. The Student must inform the Patient about the procedure explaining its purpose and clarifying any questions, worries or concerns the Patient may have, within the knowledge the Student acquired.
3. After ensuring that the Patient is informed, the Student must let him or her decide freely, exercising his or her autonomy.
4. The Student must respect the Patient's decision, even if he or she does not authorize the clinical act or refuses the student to be present.
5. The Student must respect the Patient's Right to obtain a second opinion about his health status.

## 6. MEDICAL CONFIDENTIALITY AND PATIENT'S PRIVACY

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1. The Student must have absolute respect for the confidentiality of the Patient's information, as well as the services he could have accessed during his clinical internship or education - disclosed by Patients, family or caretakers; including clinical information obtained from complementary means of diagnosis and/or communications with doctors or other health care professionals.
2. The Student must realize the importance of medical confidentiality for the establishment of a mutual relationship of trust, based on truth, between him/her and the Patient.
3. The Student must ensure confidentiality is maintained even after the interaction finishes (this includes the end of the treatment, patient discharge or even death of the Patient).
4. The Student must report to his tutor any exceptional circumstances that s/he feels may be relevant.



# FINAL REMARKS

Medical Ethics is continuously adapting to the development of Science and Healthcare, therefore, we also recognize that this National Ethical Code should be open for review in a continuous manner.

We believe that when we start a Medical degree, we are not prepared to face the ethical problems that occur naturally during the clinical practice, so we hope this National Ethical Code can be useful.

The Principles of the Charter of Rights and Duties of Patients are contemplated in this document, and every student should know and respect them.

Equally important is the Code of Ethics of Conduct and Best Practice of the Faculty, which should be supplemented by this Code of Ethics.

To create this National Ethical Code we relied on several similar documents already existing in Portugal and abroad:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
2. The European Convention on Bioethics;
3. Hippocratic Oath;
4. Lei de Bases da Saúde (Lei 48/90, de 24 de Agosto);
5. Carta de Direitos e Deveres dos Doentes;
6. Código de Deontologia Médica – Guia de Ética Médica- Consejo General de Colegios Oficiales de Médicos da OMC España;
7. Código de Ética do Estudante de Medicina; Brasília-DF Janeiro de 2004; 3.<sup>a</sup> Edição;
8. Código de Conduta e de Boas Práticas da Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade do Porto;

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9. Guia para o Estudante de Medicina, AEICBAS (Associação de Estudantes do Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas Abel Salazar);
  10. Juramento NEM/AAC (Núcleo de Estudantes de Medicina da Associação Académica de Coimbra);
  11. Documento Cerimónia da Bata Branca NEMUM (Núcleo de Estudantes de Medicina da Universidade do Minho);
  12. Manual de Ética MedUBI (Núcleo de Estudantes de Medicina da Universidade da Beira Interior);
  13. European Charter of Medical Ethics;
  14. Código Deontológico da Ordem dos Médicos.





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