

# CMA CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM

The CMA Code of Ethics and Professionalism articulates the ethical and professional commitments and responsibilities of the medical profession. The Code provides standards of ethical practice to guide physicians in fulfilling their obligation to provide the highest standard of care and to foster patient and public trust in physicians and the profession. The Code is founded on and affirms the core values and commitments of the profession and outlines responsibilities related to contemporary medical practice.

In this Code, ethical practice is understood as a process of active inquiry, reflection, and decision-making concerning what a physician's actions should be and the reasons for these actions. The Code informs ethical decision-making, especially in situations where existing guidelines are insufficient or where values and principles are in tension. The Code is not exhaustive; it is intended to provide standards of ethical practice that can be interpreted and applied in particular situations. The Code and other CMA policies constitute guidelines that provide a common ethical framework for physicians in Canada.

In this Code, medical ethics concerns the virtues, values, and principles that should guide the medical profession, while professionalism is the embodiment or enactment of responsibilities arising from those norms through standards, competencies, and behaviours. Together, the virtues and commitments outlined in the Code are fundamental to the ethical practice of medicine.

Physicians should aspire to uphold the virtues and commitments in the Code, and they are expected to enact the professional responsibilities outlined in it.

Physicians should be aware of the legal and regulatory requirements that govern medical practice in their jurisdictions.

## A. VIRTUES EXEMPLIFIED BY THE ETHICAL PHYSICIAN



### Compassion

A compassionate physician recognizes suffering and vulnerability, seeks to understand the unique circumstances of each patient and to alleviate the patient's suffering, and accompanies the suffering and vulnerable patient.



### Honesty

An honest physician is forthright, respects the truth, and does their best to seek, preserve, and communicate that truth sensitively and respectfully.



### Humility

A humble physician acknowledges and is cautious not to overstep the limits of their knowledge and skills or the limits of medicine, seeks advice and support from colleagues in challenging circumstances, and recognizes the patient's knowledge of their own circumstances.



### Integrity

A physician who acts with integrity demonstrates consistency in their intentions and actions and acts in a truthful manner in accordance with professional expectations, even in the face of adversity.



### Prudence

A prudent physician uses clinical and moral reasoning and judgement, considers all relevant knowledge and circumstances, and makes decisions carefully, in good conscience, and with due regard for principles of exemplary medical care.

# B. FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENTS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION



## Commitment to the well-being of the patient

- Consider first the well-being of the patient; always act to benefit the patient and promote the good of the patient.
- Provide appropriate care and management across the care continuum.
- Take all reasonable steps to prevent or minimize harm to the patient; disclose to the patient if there is a risk of harm or if harm has occurred.
- Recognize the balance of potential benefits and harms associated with any medical act; act to bring about a positive balance of benefits over harms.



## Commitment to respect for persons

- Always treat the patient with dignity and respect the equal and intrinsic worth of all persons.
- Always respect the autonomy of the patient.
- Never exploit the patient for personal advantage.
- Never participate in or support practices that violate basic human rights.



## Commitment to justice

- Promote the well-being of communities and populations by striving to improve health outcomes and access to care, reduce health inequities and disparities in care, and promote social accountability.



## Commitment to professional integrity and competence

- Practise medicine competently, safely, and with integrity; avoid any influence that could undermine your professional integrity.
- Develop and advance your professional knowledge, skills, and competencies through lifelong learning.



## Commitment to professional excellence

- Contribute to the development and innovation in medicine through clinical practice, research, teaching, mentorship, leadership, quality improvement, administration, or advocacy on behalf of the profession or the public.
- Participate in establishing and maintaining professional standards and engage in processes that support the institutions involved in the regulation of the profession.
- Cultivate collaborative and respectful relationships with physicians and learners in all areas of medicine and with other colleagues and partners in health care.



## Commitment to self-care and peer support

- Value personal health and wellness and strive to model self-care; take steps to optimize meaningful co-existence of professional and personal life.
- Value and promote a training and practice culture that supports and responds effectively to colleagues in need and empowers them to seek help to improve their physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Recognize and act on the understanding that physician health and wellness needs to be addressed at individual and systemic levels, in a model of shared responsibility.



## Commitment to inquiry and reflection

- Value and foster individual and collective inquiry and reflection to further medical science and to facilitate ethical decision-making.
- Foster curiosity and exploration to further your personal and professional development and insight; be open to new knowledge, technologies, ways of practising, and learning from others.