

CMDA Ethics Statement

Limits to Parental Authority in Medical Decision Making

Children are a gift from God to the family. Parents are entrusted with the responsibility to love, nurture, protect, and train for their children. In our society, when parents fail to carry out their fundamental responsibilities, the state is empowered to intervene to protect vulnerable children.

As physicians and dentists, we are obligated professionally to counsel parents regarding the health and safety of their children. In addition, we are obligated legally to report to the appropriate authorities instances of parental abuse or neglect.

We recognize that between the extremes of ideal child rearing and of abusive or negligent child rearing, there is a wide range of parental actions and choices which remains a matter of discretion. In regard to these discretionary matters, we must respect parental authority by working through the parents to improve the child's welfare.

Some parents, acting on philosophical or religious beliefs may compromise appropriate medical care for their children. In professional encounters with these parents and children, we should attempt to honor their values and beliefs whenever possible. Nevertheless our obligation remains to oppose parental decisions that may significantly harm their children.

*Approved by the House of Delegates
Passed with 51 approvals, 2 against
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