



## The Ethics of Bedside Medical Teaching

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### Background:

“Increase wisdom and do not relent, for it is your life and from it comes the outcome of life” – from the Oath of the Hebrew Physician.

The ethical duty to educate the next generation of doctors is present in oaths and declarations of medical ethics, but it has never been stated in unequivocal terms.

Frequently, the ethical obligation to teach comes into tension with core principles of medical ethics—such as patient autonomy or the patient’s best interest. After all, most patients would prefer to receive care from fully trained physicians rather than from a trainee.

Striking the delicate balance between physicians’ duties to their patients and their duty to teach requires sensitivity, compassion, and empathy.

The Ethics Bureau received a complaint regarding an incident in which a personal interview with a patient was conducted in front of the entire extended department team in a psychiatric ward, even though the patient objected. This was justified by the claim that there is an obligation to teach, even in the face of patient refusal.

During discussions on this matter, it became clear that the practice of presenting a psychiatric patient in a closed ward for discussion in front of the broader department team, is commonly accepted as part of the treatment process and for educational purposes. In many departments, this is done only after explaining the process to the patient and obtaining his or her consent—emphasizing that patients are free to share only what they feel comfortable sharing in such a setting, and that the primary purpose is their well-being.

It should be noted that the Ethics Bureau previously issued a position paper titled “Examination of Patients by Medical Students”, but that paper mainly addresses teaching by individuals who are not part of the patient’s care team. In contrast, most teaching within the healthcare system is carried out by residents, who are already physicians.

In a recent discussion of this issue, the Ethics Bureau concluded that all physicians have an ethical obligation to teach medicine to the extent of their ability and qualifications. Accordingly, this position paper was written, emphasizing the physician’s duty to show sensitivity, understanding, and sound judgment in balancing the obligation to the patient with the responsibility to teach.

### Position Statement:

1. Every physician has an ethical obligation to teach the next generation of doctors, for the benefit of society, according to his or her ability and qualifications.
2. The patient’s best interest and autonomy must remain the physician’s top priorities, even when in tension with the duty to teach.



3. Bedside teaching requires a high degree of sensitivity and empathy, alongside thoughtful judgment and awareness of the importance of educating future physicians.
4. Upon entering the treatment room, all individuals present must be introduced to the patient, with their name and roles.
5. The patient's consent must be obtained for any examination or procedure, especially when it is for teaching purposes and not essential for care. Medical treatment must not be conditioned upon the patient's agreement to participate in teaching.
6. Patients should be given prior notice that the medical institution is a teaching facility—this can be achieved, for example, by placing clear signage to that effect.