

Virtual Mentor

American Medical Association Journal of Ethics
June 2012, Volume 14, Number 6: 459.

THE CODE SAYS

The AMA *Code of Medical Ethics*' Opinion on Confidentiality of Patient Disclosure and Circumstances under Which It May Be Breached

Opinion 5.05 - Confidentiality

The information disclosed to a physician by a patient should be held in confidence. The patient should feel free to make a full disclosure of information to the physician in order that the physician may most effectively provide needed services. The patient should be able to make this disclosure with the knowledge that the physician will respect the confidential nature of the communication. The physician should not reveal confidential information without the express consent of the patient, subject to certain exceptions which are ethically justified because of overriding considerations.

When a patient threatens to inflict serious physical harm to another person or to himself or herself and there is a reasonable probability that the patient may carry out the threat, the physician should take reasonable precautions for the protection of the intended victim, which may include notification of law enforcement authorities.

When the disclosure of confidential information is required by law or court order, physicians generally should notify the patient. Physicians should disclose the minimal information required by law, advocate for the protection of confidential information and, if appropriate, seek a change in the law.

Issued December 1983. Updated based on the report "[Opinion E-5.05, 'Confidentiality,' Amendment,](#)" adopted November 2006.

Related in VM

[Monitoring Blogs: A New Dilemma for Psychiatrists](#), June 2012

[Predicting the Risk of Future Dangerousness](#), June 2012

Copyright 2012 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.