

# Virtual Mentor

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## THE CODE SAYS

### *AMA Code of Medical Ethics' Opinion on Physician Duty to Treat*

#### Opinion 9.067 - Physician Obligation in Disaster Preparedness and Response

National, regional, and local responses to epidemics, terrorist attacks, and other disasters require extensive involvement of physicians. Because of their commitment to care for the sick and injured, individual physicians have an obligation to provide urgent medical care during disasters. This ethical obligation holds even in the face of greater than usual risks to their own safety, health or life. The physician workforce, however, is not an unlimited resource; therefore, when participating in disaster responses, physicians should balance immediate benefits to individual patients with ability to care for patients in the future.

In preparing for epidemics, terrorist attacks, and other disasters, physicians as a profession must provide medical expertise and work with others to develop public health policies that are designed to improve the effectiveness and availability of medical care during such events. These policies must be based on sound science and respect for patients. Physicians also must advocate for and, when appropriate, participate in the conduct of ethically sound biomedical research to inform these policy decisions. Moreover, individual physicians should take appropriate advance measures to ensure their ability to provide medical services at the time of disasters, including the acquisition and maintenance of relevant knowledge.

Based on the report [Physician Obligation in Disaster Preparedness and Response](#), adopted June 2004.

#### **Related in VM**

[Rethinking the Physician's Duty in Disaster Care](#), June 2010

[Should I Stay or Should I Go? The Physician in Time of Crisis](#), April 2006

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