

Sexual and Romantic Boundary Violations

Considerations from the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics*



Current Patients

- Romantic or sexual interactions between physicians and patients that occur concurrently with the patient-physician relationship are unethical.
- A physician must terminate the patient-physician relationship before initiating a dating, romantic, or sexual relationship with a patient.
- A physician should avoid nonsexual, nonclinical contact with a patient if he or she has reason to believe it may be perceived as or lead to romantic or sexual contact.



Former Patients

- Sexual or romantic relationships with former patients are unethical if the physician uses or exploits trust, knowledge, emotions, or influence derived from the previous professional relationship, or if a romantic relationship would otherwise foreseeably harm the individual.



Key Third Parties

may be spouses or partners, parents, guardians, or surrogates of a current patient

- Before initiating a relationship with a key third party, physicians should take into account:
- The nature of the patient's medical problem and the likely effect on patient care.
- The length of the professional relationship.
- The degree of the third party's emotional dependence on the physician.
- The importance of the clinical encounter to the third party and the patient.
- Whether the patient-physician relationship can be terminated in keeping with ethics guidance and what implications doing so would have for patient.



Supervisors and Trainees

- Sexual harassment in the practice of medicine is unethical.
- Sexual relationships between medical supervisors and trainees are not acceptable, even if consensual. The supervisory role should be eliminated if the parties wish to pursue their relationship.