

27 August 2015

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Proposed WMA Statement on Medical Ethics and Human Rights in the Curriculum of Medical Schools World-Wide

Dear Dr Kloiber

Thank you for inviting the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) to provide feedback on the above statement.

The NZMA is the country's largest medical organisation and has a pan professional membership. We have more than 5,500 members who come from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote professional unity and values, and the health of New Zealanders. Our feedback has been informed by our Board and our Ethics Committee.

We welcome the work the WMA is doing in this important area and are strongly supportive of the recommendations in the proposed statement. The NZMA agrees that medical ethics and human rights must be taught as part of the curriculum at medical school. We also agree that it is essential for medical schools to have sufficient faculty skilled at teaching ethical enquiry and human rights to make such courses sustainable. We share the WMA's view that medical ethics and human rights should be included within postgraduate and continuing medical education.

Our association develops and publishes the Code of Ethics for the New Zealand Medical Profession,¹ a document that sets out key ethical principles and recommendations that are at the core of professional medical practice. We believe that our Code of Ethics provides a strong basis for supporting the teaching of medical ethics and human rights to medical students and doctors.

Our comments on the proposed WMA statement are of a minor nature and are limited to the preamble. They are primarily intended to improve clarity, and to remove any suggestion that ethics appraisal and an ethics evaluation can be separated from competent medical practice.

In the third paragraph, we suggest that the word ‘sieved’ be replaced with ‘evaluated’.

For paragraph six, we suggest the following wording changes (marked as track changes).

6. Given the core nature of ethical evaluation and questioning in establishing medical practice in a manner that is acceptable to society and that does not violate civil, political and other human rights, it is essential that all physicians are trained ~~to perform~~ in the ethicals evaluation of every clinical case in which they play a role, while simultaneously understanding their role in protecting the rights of individual human beings.

For paragraph eight, we suggest the following addition (marked as track changes).

8. In many countries ethics and human rights are an integral part of the medical curriculum, but this is not universal. Too often teaching is by volunteers, and can fail if those volunteers are unable or unavailable to teach or if the teaching is idiosyncratic and not on the terms accepted by the WMA.

Finally, we note that the preamble uses the terms ‘doctors’ and ‘physicians’ interchangeably. We suggest that the draft use a single term, preferably ‘doctors’.

We hope that our feedback is helpful and look forward to seeing the finalised statement.

Yours sincerely



Dr Stephen Child
NZMA Chair

¹ Available from http://www.nzma.org.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/31435/NZMA-Code-of-Ethics-2014-A4.pdf