

# Oaths & Ethics

*An Advanced Elective in the Carver College of Medicine*

**Course numbers:** MED:8413:0400 and MED:8413:0300

**Duration:** February 9 – March 5, 2026

**Class meeting times:** Mondays and Thursdays from 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM

**Class location:** 1-103 MEB

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## Objectives

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By taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the meaning and significance of a medical oath for physicians, the medical profession, and society.
2. Compare the similarities and differences between medical oaths and other professional statements such as ethical principles, codes, and charters.
3. Assess the ethical contents of different medical oaths, from the Hippocratic Oath to the Physician's Oath of the Carver College of Medicine.
4. Interview a non-medical person regarding his/her assessment of ethical values considered important for a medical oath.
5. Identify the essential content of a medical oath and incorporate that content into a personal statement of professional commitment.

## Purpose

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This Course is intended to help you appreciate the meaning and significance of a medical oath, both for yourself, and for your profession and society. The Course will examine oaths as promise statements that are highly personal, deeply ethical, and broadly professional, with attention to the principles, commitments, and virtues that are essential in medical practice. Examination of this ethical content will be facilitated by considering traditional medical oaths (e.g., versions of the Hippocratic Oath and the Declaration of Geneva), codes of ethics (e.g., the AMA Code of Ethics), contemporary statements such as the Physician Charter, and virtues that are central to the moral foundations of medicine. You will also be asked to interview a non-medical person regarding the ethical values that ought to be in a medical oath.

From such resources it will be possible to identify principles, virtues, and commitments that form recurring themes (and emerging issues) in medical ethics and professionalism. These resources will provide a lens through which to examine the Physician's Oath of the Carver College of Medicine and by which to draft your own medical oath as a reflective exercise in professional development. The Course will also help you think about the benefits of trying to increase the degree of consistency of content between oaths used in different medical schools so that society can more easily see that physicians are members of a profession that is committed to a shared set of essential ethical values. Lastly, this Course intends to help prepare you to understand and 'own' the medical oath you will profess when you graduate from the Carver College of Medicine.

## Structure

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- Class meetings (student-led discussions): 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM on Mondays & Thursdays
- Readings
- Writing (two essays, one interview report, and one oath)
- Interview report of a non-medical person regarding medical oaths

## Grading & Feedback

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The Course is graded as pass/fail.

Requirements for passing are:

- (1) attendance at class discussions;
- (2) familiarity with assigned readings as demonstrated through participation in discussions;
- (3) successful leading of class discussions; and
- (4) satisfactory completion of weekly writing assignments.

If any requirements are not met, appropriate make-up work or remediation will be assigned by the course director.

The course director will provide mid-course feedback for any student not meeting course expectations and end-of-course feedback to all students.

## **Leading or Co-Leading Seminar Discussions of Readings**

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Students will take turns leading or co-leading class discussions on the readings.

Here's some guidance to help you prepare when it is your turn:

- (1) Be familiar with the assigned readings;
- (2) Develop questions based on important topics, themes, concerns, or controversies;
- (3) Prioritize questions according to perceived relevance and interest;
- (4) Facilitate discussion by asking opening/clarifying questions and offering insights.

The purpose of discussion is not to cover everything in the readings; instead, it is to engage questions you find to be particularly interesting and relevant. The course director will help facilitate discussion as needed.

## **Interview and report of a non-medical person's thoughts about medical oath content (Week 3)**

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Identify a non-medical person (friend, family, acquaintance) who is willing to be interviewed by you about the ethical values he or she thinks should be in a medical oath. Start by using open-ended questions (e.g., "What should doctors promise to do?", or "What character traits should doctors promise to live by?"), and then (as needed) use closed-ended questions to explore ethical values that your interviewee did not initially mention but might still think are important. Then write a 1-page, single-spaced essay that reports and reflects on your findings (both expected and unexpected) from the interview.

## Course Schedule, Readings, Discussion Leaders, and Assignments

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Week 1: History and Purpose of Medical Oaths		
<b>Mon Feb 9</b>	<i>Introduction, Overview, and Discussion</i>	Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM  Group discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What core ethical values should be in a medical oath?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Thur Feb 12</b>	<p><i>Readings: <b>Ancient and Modern Oaths</b></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hippocratic Oath (<b>original</b>, Edelstein translation)</li> <li>2. Oath of Maimonides</li> <li>3. (a) Declaration of Geneva, World Med Assoc. (b) Parsa-Parsi RW. The revised Declaration of Geneva: A modern-day physician's pledge. <i>JAMA</i> 2017;318:1971-2.</li> <li>4. Hippocratic Oath – Modern Version (L. Lasagna)</li> <li>5. Physician's Oath, Carver College of Medicine</li> <li>6. Nutton V. What's in an oath? <i>J R Coll Physicians Lon</i> 1995;29:518-24.</li> <li>7. Graham D. Revisiting Hippocrates: Does an oath really matter? <i>JAMA</i> 2000;284:2841-2.</li> </ol> <p><i>Essay Assignment (the original Hippocratic Oath):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b><i>Is the <u>original</u> Hippocratic Oath relevant to you today?</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1 page, single-spaced</li> <li>○ Due Wed Feb 11 by noon (upload to ICON)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM  Group discussion:  Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:  <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 150px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 150px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div>

**Week 2: Relating Oaths, Ethics, and Codes**

<p><b>Mon Feb 16</b></p>	<p><i>Readings: <b>Ethics and the Meaning of an Oath</b></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Edelstein L. The professional ethics of the Greek physician. <i>Bulletin Hist Med</i> 1956;5:391-419.</li> <li>2. AMA Principles of Medical Ethics</li> <li>3. Gillon R. Ethics needs principles – four can encompass the rest – and respect for autonomy should be “first among equals”. <i>J Med Ethics</i> 2003;29:307-12.</li> <li>4. Pellegrino ED. The metamorphosis of medical ethics: A 30-year retrospective. <i>JAMA</i> 1993;269:1158-62.</li> <li>5. Cohen JJ. Linking professionalism to humanism: What it means, why it matters. <i>Acad Med</i> 2007;82:1029-32.</li> <li>6. Antiel et al. The Impact of Medical School Oaths and Other Professional Codes of Ethics: Results of a National Physician Survey. <i>Arch Intern Med</i> 2011;171:469-471.</li> <li>7. Sulmasy D. What is an oath and why should a physician swear one? <i>Theor Med Bioeth</i> 1999;20:329-46.</li> </ol>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Group discussion:</i></p> <p>Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Thu Feb 19</b></p>	<p><i>Readings: <b>Professional Codes of Ethics</b></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. AMA Code of Ethics, Chap. 1 (Patient-Physician Relationships)</li> <li>2. Pellegrino, Edmund D. “One Hundred Fifty Years Later: The Moral Status and Relevance of the AMA Code of Ethics.” In: <i>The American Medical Ethics Revolution: How the AMA’s Code of Ethics Has Transformed Physicians’ Relationships to Patients, Professionals, and Society</i>. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1999:107-123.</li> <li>3. ABIM Foundation. American Board of Internal Medicine. Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician charter. <i>Ann Intern Med</i> 2002;136:243-6.</li> </ol> <p><i>Essay Assignment (professing an oath):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>What are you doing when you profess a medical oath?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1 page, single-spaced</li> <li>○ Due Wed Feb 18 by noon (upload to ICON)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Group discussion:</i></p> <p>Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

### Week 3: Contents of Medical Oaths

<p><b>Mon Feb 23</b></p>	<p><i>Readings: <b>Differences in Content and Perspective</b></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greiner AM, Kaldjian LC. Rethinking medical oaths using the Physician Charter and ethical virtues. <i>Med Educ</i> 2018;52(8):826-837.</li> <li>2. Cruess R, Cruess S. Updating the Hippocratic Oath to include medicine’s social contract. <i>Med Educ</i> 2014;48:95-100.</li> <li>3. Garbutt G, Davies P. Should the practice of medicine be a deontological or utilitarian enterprise? <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>, 2011;37(5): 267-270.</li> <li>4. Pellegrino ED. Toward a virtue-based normative ethics for the health professions. <i>Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal</i> 1995;5:253-277.</li> </ol>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Group discussion:</i></p> <p>Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Thu Feb 26</b></p>	<p><i>Readings: <b>Different Cultural Perspectives</b></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ahmad WD, El-Kadi A, Zidria BA. Oath of a Muslim physician. <i>J Islamic Med Assoc North Am</i> 1988;20:11-4.</li> <li>2. Pai SA, Pandya SK. A revised Hippocratic Oath for Indian medical students. <i>Natl Med J India</i> 2010;23:360-1.</li> <li>3. Nishigori H, Harrison R, Busari J, Dornan T. Bushido and medical professionalism in Japan. <i>Acad Med</i> 2014;89:560-3.</li> <li>4. Tsai DF. Ancient Chinese medical ethics and the four principles of biomedical ethics. <i>J Med Ethics</i> 1999;25:315-21.</li> <li>5. Gesundheit B. Maimonides’ appreciation for medicine. <i>Rambam Maimonides Med J</i> 2011;2:e0018.</li> </ol> <p><i>Essay Assignment (interview report):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Interview a non-medical person regarding his/her assessment of ethical values considered important for a medical oath; then write an essay that reports and reflects on your findings.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1 page, single-spaced</li> <li>○ Due Wed Feb 25 by noon (upload to ICON)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Group discussion:</i></p> <p>Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

**Week 4: *Essential Content of a Medical Oath***

<p><b>Mon Mar 2</b></p>	<p><i>Readings: Discerning the Essentials</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hafferty FW, Franks R. The hidden curriculum, ethics teaching, and the structure of medical education. <i>Acad Med</i> 1994;69:861-71.</li> <li>2. Pellegrino ED. The medical profession as a moral community. <i>Bull NY Acad Med</i> 1990;66:221-32.</li> <li>3. Veatch RM. The sources of professional ethics: Why professions fail. <i>Lancet</i> 2009;373:1000-1.</li> <li>4. Catto G. The Hippocratic Oath: back to the future? <i>Med Educ</i> 2014;48:4-5.</li> <li>5. Jonsen A. Watching the doctor. <i>N Engl J Med</i> 1983;308:1531-5.</li> </ol>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Group discussion:</i></p> <p>Student discussion co-leaders for Readings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Thu Mar 5</b></p>	<p><i>Essay Assignment (a medical oath):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b><i>Write a medical oath that crystalizes your most important professional commitments.</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 300 words or less</li> <li>○ Due Wed Mar 4 by noon (upload to ICON)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Class: 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM</p> <p><i>Roundtable:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of each student's medical oath</li> </ul>

## Academic Integrity and the Honor Code

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Absolute academic and professional integrity must be the hallmark of all health care professionals. The profession demands that medical personnel monitor themselves and each other in order to produce quality individuals whom the public can trust and who are competent in their chosen field.

The **Honor Code** of the Carver College of Medicine states: “The Honor Code demands that community members tell the truth, live honestly, advance on individual merit, and demonstrate respect for others in the academic, clinical and research communities.” Defined infractions of the Honor Code include cheating, plagiarism (conscious and unintentional), and fabrication.

The Student Policies section of the Carver College of Medicine **Medical Student Handbook** says this about plagiarism: “Students are expected to do their own work at all times. In no instance should the work or words of another individual be represented as one’s own. All quoted material, regardless of source, must be properly cited and full attribution given to the author. Information obtained from the Web must give the full URL of the actual page accessed and the date accessed.”

Plagiarism of ideas can occur when the work of others is paraphrased (as opposed to a direct quotation). Ideas are as important as the literal statements that express them. When you appropriate ideas or statements from other people, their authorship must be acknowledged.

In this course, these academic standards will be upheld. Any behavior suggesting deviation from the spirit or letter of these standards will be investigated and, if confirmed, treated appropriately. A student who is found guilty of cheating, plagiarism, or fabrication will fail the Course.

## Human Intelligence, Not Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Since writing and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments must be prepared by the student as evidence of human intelligence. **AI-generated or AI-assisted submissions are not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism.**

## Procedures for Student Complaints

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It is the policy of The University of Iowa that each student shall be guaranteed certain rights and freedoms (<https://dos.uiowa.edu/policies/student-bill-of-rights/>), and the University provides procedures for complaints against faculty, if needed (<https://dos.uiowa.edu/policies/student-complaints-concerning-faculty-action/>).

## Policies for Students with Disabilities

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Requests for special accommodations for examinations or other course requirements must be addressed through a specific protocol coordinated centrally by the Carver College of Medicine’s Medical Student Counseling Center. The College’s *Policies for Students with Disabilities* provides that students who seek the modification of seating, testing, or other course requirements must contact the Medical Student Counseling Center at the beginning of the academic year to implement the process for determining appropriate accommodations. Any student who believes that he or she may qualify for special accommodations should contact the Counseling Center immediately.