

PREAMBLE

A Statement of Principles

The purpose of this Guide is to facilitate a greater and smoother flow of accurate and authentic medical news from the medical profession and hospitals to those who collect and disseminate such news to the public.

This Guide is not a code of censorship.

It imposes specific duties and responsibilities upon the news media, the medical profession and the hospitals.

By participation in this Guide, the news media agree to consult qualified sources for medical news, and to present this news fairly and accurately.

The doctors and hospitals agree to be accessible to news media, insofar as possible, within the time requirements of the media and to cooperate with the news media within the spirit and letter of this Guide.

Only by wholehearted participation by the news media, the medical profession and the hospitals can the Guide for Cooperation achieve its purpose.

If, on the other hand, the Guide is abused, ignored, or used for personal glorification, its purpose will be defeated.

SECTION I - GUIDE PROVISIONS

1. The executive offices of the Washington State Medical Association shall be available at all times to representatives of the press, radio and television to provide authentic information as promptly as possible on health and medical subjects. If the information desired is not immediately available, it shall be the duty of the executive offices either to obtain the information or direct the newsgatherer to a competent authority.

2. The members of the Executive Committee of the Washington State Medical Association, or spokesmen designated by the Committee, may be quoted by name in matters of public interest for purposes of authenticating information given. County medical societies are urged to adopt a similar policy in regard to their designated spokesmen. A list of the spokesmen shall be available to the representatives of the news media. This shall not be considered by their colleagues as a breach of the time-honored practice of physicians to avoid personal publicity since it is done in the best interests of the public and the profession.

3. In obtaining and disseminating information, the news media shall respect the wishes of the physician or surgeon as to the use of his name or direct quotation, but he shall give information to the press, radio and television where it does not jeopardize the doctor-patient relationship or violate the confidence, privacy or legal rights of either the public or private patient as follows:

a. In cases of accident or other emergency, the nature of injuries when ascertained, the degree of seriousness and probable prognosis.

b. In cases of illness of a personality in whom the public has a rightful interest, the nature of the illness, its gravity and the current condition.

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c. In cases of unusual injury, illness or treatment, the above information and any scientific information which will lead to a better public understanding. Any physician becoming aware of such a case is urged to notify the designated spokesman of his local medical society at once for immediate communication of appropriate information to the news media.

4. Each hospital is urged to designate spokesmen who shall be available and competent to give authentic information to the news media in accordance with Section II of this Guide. Nothing in this paragraph contemplates the providing of information which shall jeopardize the hospital-patient relationship, or which violates the confidence, privacy or legal rights of the patient.

5. Where information is given on hospital procedure, equipment, facilities for treatment, or other features of hospital service, hospital authorities shall refrain from giving the impression that such facilities exist only in the hospital named unless that is the ascertained fact.

6. All parties recognize that the first obligation of the physician and hospital is to safeguard the life and health of the patient, and shall cooperate by refraining from any action or demands that might jeopardize the patient's life or health.

7. When a physician or hospital authority is quoted by name, the news media will make certain to the best of their ability that the quotation is accurate in content.

8. On all matters of health or medical news, all parties shall make all reasonable effort to obtain authentic information from qualified sources.

9. It shall be understood that speakers at medical meetings and local physicians connected with such meetings, whether sponsored by the State Medical Association or by other medical organizations, shall be accessible to the news media without prior approval by the Association. However, the responsibility for arranging for news media participation of physicians in meetings not conducted by the Association shall rest with the officers of the sponsoring group and not with the Association.

10. Physicians are not authorized to participate in public controversial discussions as spokesmen for the State Association without prior approval by the Association. Nothing within this paragraph shall be construed to prevent a physician from speaking as an individual.

11. To supplement the foregoing, the following principles are outlined for the information of broadcasters and for the guidance of physicians who appear on radio or television programs:

a. Doctors of medicine are expected to refrain from sponsoring directly or by implication, products that are not accepted by the medical profession, such as patent medicines.

b. When introduced as a doctor, such individual cannot escape the implication of representing the medical profession and his conduct should be in keeping with the high standards of the profession. Introductions, insofar as possible, should be limited to one essential identification, such as "President of the Washington State Medical Association" or "President of the Washington State Heart Association."

c. Sound judgment, good common sense and adherence to the Principles of Medical Ethics are expected of any physician when appearing on radio or television in whatsoever capacity.

12. Nothing in this Guide shall be considered to amend in any way the Principles of Medical Ethics of the Washington State Medical Association.

SECTION II - HOSPITALS

The Washington State Hospital Association has issued the following statement concerning information about hospital patients that may be given the press, radio and television:

ACCIDENT CASES AND POLICE CASES

The following information about such cases may be supplied without specific consent of the patient:

PERSONAL: Name, address, age, sex, marital status and occupation.

CONDITION OF PATIENT: Report only as "not serious", "serious", or "critical." Avoid dramatic descriptions. No specific diagnosis or prognosis to be made. Name of the attending physician may be supplied when requested unless such physician in advance requests that he not be identified. (The name of the physician should not be used in news reports without his consent.)

NATURE OF THE ACCIDENT: State how injuries allegedly occurred - by automobile, explosion, fall, shooting, etc. Do not discuss the circumstances of the accident or who caused the accident.

BURNS: A statement may be made that a patient is burned, to what extent and the part of the body involved. No statement as to how the accident occurred may be made unless positive facts are known.

FRACTURES (Except Head Injuries): Indicate the member of the body involved and whether a simple or compound fracture. The words "possible" or "probable" should be used where X-ray diagnosis is not available.

HEAD INJURIES: State that the head is injured. The word "fracture" should not be used unless confirmed by a physician.

INTERNAL INJURIES: It may be stated there are internal injuries, but nothing more specific as to location of the injuries unless a definite diagnosis is established.

POISONING AND INTOXICATION: No statement is to be made that a patient is poisoned, intoxicated or otherwise. No statement concerning a motive may be given.

SHOOTING AND STABBING: State only that there is a penetrating wound and indicate its position. No statement may be made as to how it occurred.

UNCONSCIOUSNESS: If a person is unconscious when he is brought into the hospital, a statement of this fact may be made. Make no statement as to cause.

PRIVATE CASES: The information given should conform to the wishes of the patient and the physician. If the patient agrees to permit information to be given, the conditions are identical for those stated for accident cases.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Permission to photograph a patient in the hospital should be given (a) If, in the opinion of the physician in charge of the case, the patient's condition will not be jeopardized; (b) If the patient gives his consent (Parent or guardian in the case of a minor.)

ADMISSIONS: Admission of a patient may be acknowledged and the general condition (but not diagnosis) stated.

BIRTHS: Hospitals can give information concerning births in accordance with local practice.

DEATHS: Death of a patient is presumed to be a matter of public record and may be released by the hospital.