The Hippocratic Oath and its Importance in the Delivery of Care

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The physicians' oath not only predicts major federal statutes, but also reminds that a respectful team approach to healthcare is vital.
Source: Physicians Practice

As any physician knows, the Hippocratic Oath is more than just a "swear," it is a contract. The contract includes the trust instilled by the patient to the physician. A few salient paragraphs of the Oath include:

• Into whatever homes I go, I will enter them for the benefit of the sick, avoiding any voluntary act of impropriety or corruption….
• Whatever I see or hear in the lives of my patients, whether in connection with my professional practice or not, which ought not to be spoken of outside, I will keep secret, as considering all such things to be private.
• So long as I maintain this Oath faithfully and without corruption, may it be granted to me to partake of life fully and the practice of my art, gaining the respect of all men for all time. However, should I transgress this Oath and violate it, may the opposite be my fate.

What is interesting is that the Greeks had HIPAA in mind long before it became a law in the United States in August 1996. And, "without corruption" is synonymous with the language of the Federal Anti-Kickback Statute, Stark Laws, and the Physician Sunshine Act. Moreover, "gaining the respect of all men for all time" extends beyond the patient and their families to the staff, the contractors, and the other professionals a physician works with. In the world of value-based purchasing and hospital-acquired conditions, a respectful team approach is vital. While optimal financial benefit may be realized, the greater benefit is the knowledge of the respect given and gained.

A recent blog post by author and healthcare expert Sandy Costa entitled, "Lessons in Management from a Cobbler’s Son," provides insights on what he learned from his father in the area of leadership and respect.

First, don’t let an organizational chart go to your head. Imparting respect to the person who operated the elevator was as important as the respect shown to the accountant. Second, instead of a hierarchy, view everyone as interconnected. Not everyone is the CEO, the physician, or the lawyer. But having these positions is both a privilege and a responsibility. By recognizing that "the title of the job is simply an identifier — it’s not what makes the person important" will enable the person at the top to emerge as someone who is respected and, in turn, realize positive benefits to the organization.

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