

Preserving and Restoring the Legacy of the Oath of Hippocrates

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The Oath of Hippocrates lays out, in succinct and timeless form, a vision of medicine bounded by a set of moral commitments. These commitments are presented and pledged as a covenant—a sacred promise, made before the physician's God, to each of his patients. The Hippocratic physicians recognized that at stake was not only the personal character and virtue of the physician, but also the reputation of the art and practice of medicine itself, and that this could only be safeguarded by scrupulous obedience to the Physician's Law. "The Oath explicitly forbids the physician to pass on his clinical knowledge to anyone who has not already committed himself to the Hippocratic values."¹

At the time it was first penned and sworn, it represented a definitive break with the surrounding culture and values of the medical establishment. It is a call to reform, with the fundamental recognition that the purpose of medicine is "to help the sick," and that this is to be done "according to my ability and judgment," but "never used to injure or wrong them."¹ If followed generally, these precepts would have prevented much of the chaos of the COVID crisis, in which physicians refused to see the sick in their clinics and instead abandoned them to the emergency departments, blindly followed sham guidelines, ignored safe and effective early treatments borne out by clinical experience, and supported draconian and unethical requirements for mass COVID "vaccination." The loss of society's trust is a self-inflicted wound.

At a time when the Oath is at best seen as outdated and quaint, it shines forth gloriously in both its timelessness and its timeliness. As medicine institutionally abandons the precepts that gave it such honor in Western Civilization, "the Oath is returning to its original role—that of a manifesto for reform in medical values."¹ There remains a remnant in our once-noble profession.

Medical experimentation, abortion, euthanasia, and sexual coercion are all specifically named and prohibited by the Oath. Why? Those are the vices that characterized it in the time of Hippocrates, and they have emerged again as the defiling blemishes of our age. If medicine is practiced for any other end than that of the individual patient's health, then one can have no confidence that the physician's efforts are motivated by the patient's best interests. If administering poison is optional, then who is to say your physician is not hired to eliminate you?

If health is not understood definitively, as "an objective bodily norm" and "an objective *human* good,"² then how can there be any scientific or philanthropic way of acting in a patient's interests? If medicine is not grounded in biological reality, and the understanding that life itself is good and ordered by the design in nature, then medicine loses its way. If human life is measured only by its desirability, then any life becomes expendable.

The dreadfully bitter flower of the moral logic of denying the worth of human life blossomed in the practice of infant exposure in ancient Greece and in abortion and euthanasia. And if the covenant is not with the individual patient instead of the "community" or the "public," who is to say that any particular patient should not become a statistical casualty of a vaccine program or surgical experimentation in the name of public health and the greater good?

Like Esau, we have traded our Hippocratic birthright, and with it our professional respectability, for the pottage of "evidenced-based medicine" (industry-manufactured guidelines) and "public health" (socialist planning). It is no surprise that medicine outside of the Hippocratic tradition has no respect or trust. It never has, and it never will.

If we would reform medicine and restore integrity and respect to our once-noble profession, we must start by recommitting ourselves to this ancient Code. And we must ensure that the rising generation of medical professionals are taught it also. The Hippocratic physicians did not take their Oath at the end of their medical training. They took it at the beginning. It is incumbent upon us to take our professional moral values and teach them to undergraduate students before they reach medical school, before they are lost in the abyss of our defunct education system. Successfully restoring morals and professionalism to medicine necessitates the successful transfer of Hippocratic medicine to the next generation of future physicians.

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