Request to Review Ethical Guidelines and Practices for U.S. Military Medical Professionals

Information Brief

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August 19, 2013
Overview & Purpose

• Request to the Defense Health Board (DHB):
  – Review ethical guidelines and practices for military medical professionals
  – Provide recommendations regarding optimal support for military medical professionals as they confront ethical dilemmas, while identifying existing gaps and opportunities for improvement

• ASD (HA) has posed two specific questions:
  – How can military physicians most appropriately balance their obligations to their patients against their obligations as military officers to help commanders maintain military readiness?
  – How much latitude should military medical professionals be given to refuse participation in medical procedures or request excusal from military operations with which they have ethical reservations or disagreement?
Question #1: Dual Agency

How can military medical professionals achieve balance between potentially conflicting obligations?

- Occupational health/sports medicine models
  - Mitigating factors: shared values and commitment to mission

Examples:

- Battlefield decisions involving scarce resources or mission requirements
- Occupational medicine/disability assessments
- Fitness for duty evaluations
Military Professionals must balance potentially conflicting personal beliefs, cultural differences, professional obligations, laws, regulations, ethical guidance.

Examples:

- Participation in elective abortion or withdrawal of life support
- Involuntary treatment for communicable disease or treatment in case of mental incapacity
- Treatment of enemy combatants and detainees who may wish to refuse recommended or life-saving treatment
Policy and Ethics Guidance for Military Professionals

Ethics Guidance:
– Hippocratic Oath (Hippocrates, 400 b.c.)
– Formal medical ethics guidance
  • AMA Ethics Manual, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, other Professional Societies

Laws

Additional guidance and obligations for military physicians:
– U.S. Military Oath of Office
– Uniform Code of Military Justice
– DoD Issuances
– Service Issuances
Examples of Pertinent Department of Defense Policies

- DoDI 6000.14--Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities in the Military Health System (MHS) (September 26, 2011)
- DoDI 6490.4--Requirements for Mental Health Evaluations of Members of the Armed Forces (March 4, 2013)
- DODI 6490.08--Command Notification Requirements to Dispel Stigma in Providing Mental Health Care to Service Members (August 17, 2011)
- DoDI 6495.02--Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Procedures (March 28, 2013)
- DoDI 2310.08E--Medical Program Support for Detainee Operations (June 6, 2006)