

The Italian Code of Medical Deontology: characterizing features of its 2014 edition

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The latest edition of the Italian Code of Medical Deontology has been released by the Italian Federation of the Registers of Physicians and Dentists in May 2014 (1). The previous edition of the Italian Code dated back to 2006 (2), and it has been integrated and updated by a multi-professional and inter-disciplinary panel involving, besides physicians, representatives of scientific societies and trade unions, juriconsults and experts in bioethics.

The 2014 text is made up of 79 items and a final disposition, and also foresees a professional oath and three attached applicative guidelines, regarding items 30, 47 and 78. The 79 items are included under eighteen Titles, concerning Content and Aims; Duties and Competence of Physicians; Relationship with the Assisted Person; Information and Communication, Consent and Dissent; Transplantations of Organs, Tissues and Cells; Sexuality, Reproduction and Genetics; Research and Experimentation; Medical Treatment and Personal Freedom; Professional Fees, Health Information and Advertising; Relationships with Colleagues; Medical-Legal Activity; Intra- and Inter-Professional Relationships; Relationships with Public and Private Health Structures; Sports Medicine; Protection of Public Health; Potentiating and Aesthetic Medicine; Military Medicine; Informatics and Health Innovation (1).

Items 1 and 2 define precisely the structure and the meaning of the Code, highlighting that the ignorance of this text on the part of physicians does not protect them from disciplinary action, while item 3 accurately defines the specific expertise and the gen-

eral duties of physicians. The 2014 edition pays enhanced attention to environmental safeguard, health care safety, clinical risk, pain control, the struggle against illicit practice, informed consent and dissent. With reference to this last point, the new Code clearly indicates that physicians have to acquire the consent or the dissent of patients in written and signed form, or with other modalities carrying equivalent documentary efficacy.

At the linguistic level, in the 2014 text the term “patient” is often flanked by the expression “assisted person” to indicate, in the concept of the experts who have prepared this latest edition of the Italian Code, that the efforts of the health system must be directed not only towards the technical medical management of sick people, but also, and in a broader perspective, towards the promotion and the safeguard of single individuals and of the whole community.

Four brand new items are present, comparing the 2014 edition with previous releases, and namely item 76, regarding “potentiating medicine”, item 77, concerning military medicine, item 78, discussing the application of informatics technologies in health care, and item 79, presenting the relationships between innovation and health organization. Interestingly, item 76 states that, when physicians are asked to perform medical interventions aimed at potentiating the physiological psycho-physical capacities of individuals, they are called upon to act according to the precautionary principle and the principles of proportionality and respect for the self-determination of the person. This is so both in the research field and in professional prac-

tice, and physicians must obtain, with regard to this, written informed consent. The principle of proportionality should be followed by physicians even in the case of their use of information and communication technologies in the perspective of diagnosis and therapy. With specific reference to this, item 78 states that, together with the principle of proportionality, other criteria have to be fulfilled, and in particular appropriateness, efficacy, safety and respect for the individual rights and for the applicative guidelines which are attached to this edition of the Italian Code (1).

The 2014 edition of the National Code of Medical Deontology has prompted wide and in-depth discussion in Italy, showing that this professional guide, that is more than a hundred years old in Italy, attracts constantly high and renewed attention not only in the medical field, but also in society as a whole (3,4).

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