

Ethics in Medicine - The Hippocratic Oath!

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Received: August 14, 2019

Published: September 20, 2019

DOI: 10.31080/ASMS.2019.S01.0004

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Keywords: Ethics in Medicine; Hippocratic Oath; Diets; Obesity; Diabetes; and Coronary Artery Disease

On May 16th 1986, the primary author took his Physicians Hippocratic Oath at the University of Iowa, in Iowa City, Iowa and officially became a member of the medical community. This Oath hangs on the wall of his office where he frequently looks at it wondering whatever happened to the field of medicine.

Physicians are supposed to be well-educated, enlightened individuals, who read the medical literature to determine what is and is not good for their patients. According to the Oath, physicians will place their patients health first and not yield to other influences. Unfortunately, other forces sometimes do intervene and muddy the waters of truth. One such example is the area of diets and weight loss.

Since obesity is now a major healthcare issue in the United States, and elsewhere, it should come as no surprise, that there is money to be made by influencing doctors to prescribe a certain diet or medication for weight loss, regardless of the scientific data. If the data isn't available, don't worry; if you wait long enough, something will tend to support what you are saying if properly modified and analyzed.

During the last 30 - plus years the primary author has been involved in several research studies looking at the effect of different diets and how they affect heart disease. His first real exposure to risk factors and heart disease came in the mid-to-late 1980's, when he was asked to become a member of the then newly formed Cho-

lesterol Education Faculty through the Iowa Heart Association. Between 1989 and 1992 he was involved in the work being headed up by Dean Ornish [1] and others, looking at the effect of a vegetarian lifestyle and heart disease. Shortly thereafter, he completed several other studies, which were first noted in publications included with AHA meetings held in 1993 and 1994 [2-8].

However, it would not be until the 1995 London [9] and Maui [10] medical conferences that the research would make it clear that the primary inflammatory mediators of coronary artery disease (CAD) was the result of excess calories, including refined carbohydrates, and saturated fats. Since then, there have been several additional studies [11-21] presented at multiple medical conferences and published in peer review medical journals, which confirm this.

More recently the research looked at the effects of low fat diets [22,23] and heart disease, as well as the effect of high protein high fat low carbohydrate diets and heart disease [24-28]. Despite claims published by Westman [29] and paid for by Atkins, the first data to examine the long-term effects of high protein high fat low carbohydrate diets, wasn't published until 2000 - 2002 [25,26].

These studies not only looked at the effects of these diets on lipid levels, clotting and inflammatory factors, but included measurements of heart disease and coronary blood flow [22-28,30].

Unfortunately many physicians, like the general public, believe that low carbohydrate diets are good for you because you are eating less sugar. To the best of our knowledge, no one has yet published a study or suggested, that a diet high in sugar provided a health benefit or would help you lose weight. Notwithstanding that, it is also important that we not forget basic biochemistry - insulin increases independent of whether you are consuming protein, carbohydrates, or fat. It is merely the speed or rate at which insulin levels rise.

If physicians truly want to help their patients understand weight loss, obesity and diets, then it's time for a refresher course and based upon what we've been reading and hearing, this does not appear to be coming from the current medical literature, lay press, radio or television adds, infomercial, or social media. Every week patients see their doctors having heard on the radio, television, or read in the newspaper or magazine, or seen on twitter or face book, that a certain medicine or dietary supplement will improve their health, or that a certain diet will help them lose weight- GAURANTEED!

Medications and diets should not be based upon the opinions of celebrities, or the popular press.

Given the current trends in obesity today, it is fairly common for people to come in wanting permission to start a diet. After decades people still want a magic bullet and some diets promise just that. In the mid 1900's many people took a "pill" to reduce weight loss and guess what? It worked! The only problem was that inside the "pill" were tapeworm eggs, which hatched and once they were inside you, they attached themselves to your intestines, where they, not you, absorbed most if not all, of the calories and nutrients present in the food you ate. Before you knew it you were losing weight and lots of it. In fact, before you knew it you looked like a Dachau prisoner of war.

The current popular debate includes a revised version of low carbohydrate diets, including KETO and carnivore diets. The truth is, there is no magic diet for people to lose weight. Long-term weight loss isn't a diet gimmick. The ultimate irony is how easily medical practitioners have been influenced by social media and studies which have failed to actually measure more than mere changes in weight or blood tests.

Perhaps this is the best time to review the Hippocratic Oath, or in the instance of the first author, his Declaration of Geneva, to which he has added his thoughts in parentheses.

Today I again looked at my Hippocratic Oath, the Oath which I and my classmates took came from the Declaration of Geneva and I have included my thoughts in parentheses:

At the time of being admitted as a member of the medical profession

(Today and hereafter.)

I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity.

(I will do my best to take care of people.)

I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due;

(I will honor my teachers as they honor their patients and themselves. We have all had good teachers and bad teachers and they do not deserve to be treated the same, otherwise, we dishonor the good ones and give false credit to the bad ones.)

I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity;

(I will think through what I am doing, providing the best care possible for my patients and respecting their rights, beliefs and wishes as well. I do not have the right to impose my beliefs upon them nor force them to receive treatment they do not want, even if it would make me feel better. It's not about me, it's about them!)

The health of my patient will be my first consideration;

(The health of the patient and his/her wishes come first and foremost. Not the insurance company, pharmaceutical industry, commercial business, nor the government.)

I will respect the secrets which are confided to me;

(What the patient tells me is between the patient and me, not someone else who can get a hold of the patient records. What the patient is telling me is supposed to be between the patient and me.)

I will maintain, by all the means in my power, the honor and the noble traditions of the medical profession;

(I will do whatever I can to take care of and honor my patient.)

I will not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race, party politics or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient;

(I am here for the patient, not the current popular thinking of the day. Failure to apply this, lead to physicians within Nazi Germany to do many things which were wrong and we are no more angelic than the physicians of the 1930's and 40's.)

I will maintain the utmost respect for human life; even under threat, I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity.

(Again, when government or religious beliefs control human life, that life has little value except as determined by the religion or government. I must remain neutral and treat friend and foe alike.)

I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honor.

(This is my promise which will not be broken!)

When physicians are influenced by the social media and patients to do that which is inconsistent with the scientific data, perhaps they need to ask themselves; are they truly doing no harm?.

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