

SOLICITATION OF FUNDS FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH

Background

Various organizations, including hospital foundations, raise funds by soliciting previous clientele of their institution.

Major concern has been expressed, both within and outside the medical profession, about two issues:

1. The morality of such endeavours.
2. The potential for a breakdown in confidentiality.

Requirement

Physicians who become involved in or participate in any fund-raising processes which utilize patient data bases must observe the following and must satisfy themselves that the following conditions have been met:

1. The fund-raising office must only receive demographic information about patients cared for at the specific institution and this should be limited to name and address only.
2. No details about diagnosis may be transmitted.
3. The list must not be derived from a population which is usually regarded as sensitive, e.g. therapeutic abortion patients.
4. Communication to individuals whose names have been extracted from data bases should not differ from any generic communication for fund-raising that is sent to other individuals who have not been patients in the relevant institution.
5. The communication should contain no reference to the patient's use of the facility. Personalization of this type can be construed by some to be a breach of confidentiality, despite the absence of specific clinical information.
6. Remember that the focus on fund-raising is increasingly geared to the "grateful patient." In general this appears to be accepted as a legitimate and ethical pursuit in most of the North American health environment. The ethical issues will evolve, and will need to be dealt with from time to time. However, in relating to what may be perceived to be "grateful patients", fund-raisers must be mindful that one of the statements in the Code of Conduct of the medical profession is that an ethical physician will practise in a fashion that is above reproach and will take neither physical, emotional nor financial advantage of the patient. Undue pursuit of the "grateful patient" for fund-raising purposes is an inappropriate form of emotional pressure to achieve financial gain.

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**A statement is a formal position of the College with
which members shall comply.**

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