

## Codes of Medical Ethics across Centuries and around the World

### Course Instructors

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### Course Description

We often take for granted the existence and meaning of medical ethics—and an associated singular history traceable back to the Hippocratic Oath. Jointly led by a healthcare ethicist and a historian, our discussions will examine some landmark codes and address how each emerged from specific sociopolitical conditions. Bookended by consideration of the first (1847) and most recent (2021) versions of the American Medical Association Code of Ethics, the course will challenge common myths and misconceptions about the Hippocratic Oath; explore codes from beyond “the West”; and compare the principles and practices that drive the medical and nursing professions. The course will conclude by reflecting on codes past and present to consider what may/should lie ahead.

### Learning Objectives

1. Appreciate the political and social contexts in which these texts emerged
2. Recognize how context manifests in the texts themselves
3. Understand the codes’ implications for medical (and nursing) training and practice

### Course Topics and Schedule (subject to revision)

#### Week 1: Roots of Current U.S. Medical Ethics

*Readings:* Excerpt from the American Medical Association Code of Ethics (1847); and Nuremberg Code (1947)

#### Week 2: Where It All Began: Hippocrates (?)

*Readings:* Hippocratic Oath (c. 400 BCE); and the “Oath of Initiation” from the *Charaka Samhita* (codified c. 100 BCE - 200 CE)

#### Week 3: Beyond “the West”: China

*Readings:* Sun Simiao, “On the Absolute Sincerity of Great Physicians” (7<sup>th</sup> century CE); and Code of Chen Shih-Kung (early 17<sup>th</sup> century CE)

#### Week 4: Beyond “the West”: [Jews in] The Islamic World

*Readings:* Oath of Asaf (7<sup>th</sup> century CE); and an excerpt from Maimonides, “Treatise on Asthma” (1190 CE)

#### Week 5: Nursing: A Separate Ethics?

*Readings:* Lystra Gretter, “Nightingale Pledge” (1873); and Harriet C. Camp, “The Ethics of Nursing: Talks of a Superintendent with Her Graduating Class” (1889)

#### Week 6: Where are We Now? Where Do We Go from Here?

*Readings:* Portions of the American Medical Association Code of Ethics (rev. June 2021)—at least the Preamble and the nine Principles of Medical Ethics