



Belgrade Declaration on Healthcare Justice for Pregnant, Fetal, and Neonatal Patients

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World Association of Perinatal Medicine

Global organizations have emphasized the need for healthcare for pregnant women and newborn children. The World Health Organization states: "Pregnancy – the nine months or so for which a woman carries a developing embryo and fetus in her womb – is for most women a time of great happiness and fulfillment. However, during pregnancy, both the woman and her developing child face various health risks. For this reason, it is important that all pregnancies should be monitored by skilled care providers." (<http://www.who.int/topics/pregnancy/en/>) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children "...have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible..." and that "Rich countries should help poorer countries to achieve this" (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>). In response to these other international statements, campaigns for the improvement of maternal and newborn health have made progresses but much remains to be done.

The World Association of Perinatal Medicine is committed to protecting and promoting the health-related interests of pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients worldwide. This is a vulnerable population of patients in many countries, especially low-income countries or after major natural disasters. Perinatologists in all countries should advocate for the resources needed to protect and promote the health-related interests of pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients.

Ethical Framework

The ethical concept of healthcare justice creates an ethical obligation to provide clinical care that a patient needs in evidence-based clinical judgment. Healthcare justice creates the professional responsibilities of perinatologists in patient care and advocacy for health policy.

Professional Responsibilities in Patient Care of Pregnant, Fetal, and Neonatal Patients

- Develop clinical practices based on the best available evidence about maternal, fetal, or neonatal benefit of clinical management
- Prevent biases that arise from individual or group self-interest, to promote evidence-based practice
- Conduct scientifically, clinically, and ethically well-designed research to improve perinatal outcomes
- Recommend evidence-based clinical management

- Implement the healthcare-justice-based rights of pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients to evidence-based clinical management
- Prevent clinical management that lacks an evidence base and should therefore be considered wasteful
- Implement informed consent processes that explain evidence-based clinical practice to pregnant patients and new parents, to gain their trust in evidence-based practice
- Implement culturally sensitive and competent decision making processes with pregnant patients and new parents
- Commit to an ethics of cooperation among professions and disciplines, with the goal of providing comprehensive, integrated clinical management for pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients
- Educate patients and society that the prevention of diseases as well as promotion of health should begin in utero, because there is increasing evidence that prenatal development is a major determinant of adult health and disease

Professional Responsibilities in Advocacy for Health Policy for Pregnant, Fetal, and Neonatal Patients

- Advocate for public and private resources in one's own country that are required to deliver evidence-based clinical management in the appropriate institutional setting
- Advocate for healthcare policies that encourage research and development to guarantee a constant, dynamic improvement in perinatal healthcare
- Advocate for recognition of the healthcare-justice-based rights of pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients to evidence-based clinical management
- Advocate for health policy that supports perinatologists in preventing wasteful clinical practices
- Advocate for public and private resources from high-income countries that are required to deliver evidence-based clinical management in the appropriate institutional setting
- Advocate for inclusive process for decision making about national healthcare budgets so that the health interests of pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients are addressed
- Advocate for health policy designed to prevent bias originating in individual or group self-interest, including appropriate use of the civil and criminal law to support evidence-based clinical practice
- Advocate for health policy that promotes an ethics of cooperation among professions and disciplines, with the goal of providing comprehensive, integrated clinical management to pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients
- Advocate for resources to prevent clinically unacceptable differences in outcomes for pregnant, fetal, and neonatal patients that can be created by national and regional differences in perinatal biotechnology
- Advocate for resources to prevent diseases and promote health of fetal patients, beginning in utero, in response to increasing evidence that prenatal development is a major determinant of adult health and disease