

PREVENTIVE CARE RECOMMENDATIONS ADOLESCENT AGES 11-18

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality in Adolescent Health Care

This statement was approved as policy by the following organizations: the American Academy of Pediatrics; the American Academy of Family Physicians; the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; NAACOG-The Organization for Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nurses; and the National Medical Associations.

Adolescents tend to underutilize existing health care resources. The issue of confidentiality has been identified, by both providers and young people themselves, as a significant access barrier to health care.

Adolescents in the United States, while generally considered healthy, have a range of problems, including some of such severity as to jeopardize their development and health, their future opportunities and even their lives. To illustrate, there is an urgent need to reduce the incidence of adolescent suicide, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy.

As the primary providers of health care to adolescents, we urge the following principles for the guidance of our professional members and for broad consideration in the development of public policy:

1. Health professionals have an ethical obligation to provide the best possible care and counseling to respond to the needs of their adolescent patients.

2. This obligation includes every reasonable effort to encourage the adolescent to involve parents, whose support can, in many circumstances, increase the potential for dealing with the adolescent's problems on a continuing

basis.

3. Parents are frequently in a patient relationship with the same providers as their children or have been exercising decision-making responsibility for their children with these providers. At the time providers establish an independent relationship with adolescents as patients, the providers should make this new relationship clear to parents and adolescents with regard to the following elements:

- The adolescent will have an opportunity for examination and counseling apart from parents, and the same confidentiality will be preserved between the adolescent patient and the provider as between the parent/adult and the provider.

- The adolescent must understand under what circumstances (eg., life-threatening emergency), the provider will abrogate this confidentiality.

- Parents should be encouraged to work out means to facilitate communication regarding appointments, payment, or other matters consistent with the understanding reached about confidentiality and parental support in this transitional period when the adolescent is moving toward self-responsibility for health care.

4. Providers, parents, and adolescents need to be aware of the nature and effect of laws and regulations in their jurisdictions that introduce further constraints on these relationships. Some of these laws and regulations are unduly restrictive and in need of revision as a matter of public policy. Ultimately, the health risks to the adolescents are so impelling that legal barriers and deference to parental involvement should not stand in the way of needed health care. ■

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Reaffirmed 1/93

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