



August 21, 2015

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Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Society of General Internal Medicine is a national medical society of 3,000 physicians who are the primary internal medicine faculty of every medical school and major teaching hospital in the United States. We are writing to urge you to adopt the recommendations from the Defense Health Board's independent review issued in March of this year, "Ethical Guidelines and Practices for U.S. Military Medical Professionals." Adopting the recommendations is an important first step toward supporting the dedicated military physicians, nurses and other health professionals in acting in accordance with the ethics of our profession.

The Board's recommendations are straightforward and consistent with core values of the medical profession that we share. Recommendation 2 is especially important, affirming that "*Throughout its policies, guidance and instructions, DoD must ensure that the military health care professional's first ethical obligation is to the patient.*" This core value and expectation sets a standard for all military medical practice. Additionally, its recommendation to create an ethical code "based on accepted codes from various health care professions to serve as a guidepost to promote ethical leadership and set a standard for the cultural ethos of the MHS" would align DoD with accepted medical ethics standards in the United States.

Other key recommendations include

- An ethics infrastructure that can serve to lessen, mitigate, or assist in resolving ethical conflicts that might arise among health care professionals or between health care professionals and line leadership;
- An ethics portal and a robust military medical ethics consultation service based on published rules regarding the organization, composition, training and operation of medical ethics committees and medical ethics consultation services within the military health system;
- Education and training, including pre-deployment training, for military health professionals;
- To minimize dual loyalty conflicts, inclusion of senior medical officers as full members of Commanders' staffs as advisors on medical ethics;



- Tightened standards of medical confidentiality within the military; and
- Excusal of health professionals from procedures that violate their code of ethics.

We would be pleased to meet with you about why we think the recommendations of the Defense Health Board are critical, and would also welcome continuing dialogue about professional obligations as they relate to military medicine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marshall Chin'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marshall Chin, MD, MPH  
President  
Society of General Internal Medicine

cc Jonathan Woodson, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs