

Examination of Conscience for Physicians

Physicians are really no different than all other sinners. However, there are areas of a moral life of unique concern to physicians. Many are obvious, including physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, the prescription of contraceptive pills, referral for sterilization or abortion, or unethical business practices. These examples are straightforward and uniquely related to the professional practice of medicine. Yet, at the core of the virtuous life of a physician, much more fundamental options need to be approached in the affirmative. For instance, is God's absolute call to humility and service in dealing with patients and colleagues respected? Is the physician honest in his business practices and always respectful of confidentiality? Does he/she always recognize the inherent dignity of every patient at all times and in all circumstances?

These questions are perhaps more fundamental to the spiritual life of the physician than all others since from them flow correct moral reasoning.

The Church has always recommended the sacrament of penance to Catholic as part of their journey into a life of holiness and sanctity. How can a physician gain the strength and grace available through this sacrament? First, one must get one's priorities in order. A comprehensive examination of conscience for physicians is a good start. I have found the following questions to serve as an excellent stimulus, a conscience tickler if you will, in probing one's conscience in the practice of medicine.

Personal

1. Do I do all things solely for the honor and glory of God?
2. Do I pridefully believe that I am the/a savior or that I can do my work completely by my own strength?
3. Have I completely surrendered to His will for my life, including the vocation of medicine?
4. Am I ashamed of my Catholic identity and failed to publicly defend Jesus Christ and His Church?
5. Do I pray and read the Holy Scriptures daily?
6. Have I maintained modesty and chastity, both outside and within my medical practice?
7. Do I avoid scurrilous conversation, foul language, or distasteful humor?
8. Have I shown due respect for my own body with diet, exercise, sleep, and ordered living, in order to give good example to my patients?
9. Have I become addicted to or relied on illegal drugs, medications, alcohol, food, or media?
10. Have I humbly sought help if others have expressed concern about my mental health or lifestyle?
11. Do I make a habit of complaining about my work-load?
12. Have I been lazy with the calling and gift of medicine?
13. Have I neglected duties elsewhere—to God, family, or friends, due to being consumed with work?
14. Have I become angry or bitter regarding work, due to thwarted or selfish personal or professional desires?

Patient-oriented

15. Do I pray for my patients daily?
16. Do I take the time to be fully present to patients when I'm with them, encountering them as persons made in the image of God?

17. Have I broken the seal of confidentiality by sharing personal details learned in the patient/physician relationship?
18. Have I been disrespectful to, or humiliated others in my practice, including teachers, colleagues, staff, or patients, or gossiped behind their backs?
19. Have I treated the suffering of others with contempt?
20. Have I been neglectful in my responsibility to be available, within reason, to my patients when needed?
21. Have I harmed a patient through negligence due to sloth, laziness, pride in my own abilities, or failure to consult; or through impairment due to drugs, alcohol, or lack of sleep?
22. Have I made myself available to all seeking my care without bias, including patients with financial constraints, addictive or psychiatric disorders, those with infectious diseases, those with gender dysphoric conditions or sexual perversions, or any “difficult patient,” or made reasonable accommodations for them if unable to do so personally?
23. Have I maintained purity and chastity toward patients and colleagues, and sought to remove myself from situations of temptation?

Professional-oriented

24. Do I truly give a good Christian witness to all I meet professionally?
25. Have I sincerely made efforts to study the medical sciences and to remain current with literature to be competent in my field?
26. Have I been negligent in timeliness of communication, administrative tasks, or other responsibilities?
27. Have I stolen from my employer or patients by engaging in non-work activities during working hours, including social media, personal phone calls, or texting?
28. Have I been dishonest in my charting, including lying about questions I had not asked, covering up important details, using “copy and paste” or puffing up the chart, or been fraudulent with billing or the filing of insurance claims?
29. Have I lied during check-out to a colleague or attempted to conceal any personal mistakes?
30. Have I engaged in questionable or immoral research activities, or misconstrued data in my research?

Sanctity of Life

31. Have I recommended or performed an abortion?
32. Have I recommended or prescribed artificial contraception or sterilization?
33. Have I recommended illicit forms of fertility treatments, such as in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, or surrogate motherhood?
34. Have I participated in euthanasia or physician assisted suicide, or failed to recommend life-sustaining support to those who are not terminally ill? Conversely, have I recommended continuation of care due to pride, when aware that it was futile and harmful?
35. Have I failed to engage in meaningful conversations about the sanctity of life with patients or colleagues (or publicly or politically) due to laziness, embarrassment, or fear?
36. Have I sought to avoid scandal, by making evil appear good?
37. Have I failed to defend the orphaned, unborn, widowed, single parents, elderly (including those with dementia), mentally or physically disabled persons, foreigners or immigrants, or any other vulnerable person in society, or have I stood by when they were being harmed?

Financial

38. Am I willing to offer my services indiscriminately without consideration of prestige, financial, or other personal gain?
39. Have I allowed the inappropriate influence of pharmacies or business institutions to compromise my medical care?
40. Do I unnecessarily blame other companies, governments, or persons working in them for societal evils when these are outside of their control?
41. Have I inappropriately acquired gifts or financial rewards in my medical practice?
42. Have I squandered my income on unnecessary, self-gratifying, or frivolous pursuits and attempted to justify the expense to myself?
43. Have I given generously from my income, recognizing that my financial wealth is a gift that comes from God, and for which I am a steward?

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