

Is the Writing on the Wall for Current Medical Oaths?

Oaths recited in medical schools provide valuable insight into the medical profession's evolving core of ethical commitments. This study presents a brief overview of medical oaths, and how they came to attain their current prominence. The authors examine medical oaths used in twentieth-century North America (the USA and Canada) through a critical review of six studies on oath administration and content that were undertaken between 1928 and 2004. While oath-taking became almost universally prevalent in twentieth-century North American medical schools, the ethical content of oaths grew increasingly heterogeneous. The findings challenge assumptions about the content of medical oaths. They also create dynamic markers for gauging the variability in the current ethical milieus of medical education, providing a basis for evaluating future direction.