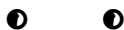


The patient-centered medical home (PCMH), with its focus on patient-centered care, holds promise as a way to reinvigorate the primary care of patients and as a necessary component of health care reform. While its tenets have been the subject of review, the ethical dimensions of the PCMH have not been fully explored. Consideration of the ethical foundations for the core principles of the PCMH can and should be part of the debate concerning its merits. The PCMH can align with the principles of medical ethics and potentially strengthen the patient-physician relationship and aspects of health care that patients value. Patient choice and these ethical considerations are central and at least as important as the economic and practical arguments in support of the PCMH, if not more so. Further, the ethical principles that support key concepts of the PCMH have implications for the design and implementation of the PCMH. This paper explores the PCMH in light of core principles of ethics and professionalism, with an emphasis both on how the concept of the PCMH may reinforce core ethical principles of medical practice and on further implications of these principles.

KEY WORDS: patient-centered medical home; ethics; professionalism; patient-physician relationship.  
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active involvement by informed patients”.<sup>1</sup> While the basic tenets of the concept have been extensively reviewed, the ethical dimensions of the PCMH have yet to be fully



The patient-centered medical home (PCMH) has been widely promoted as a concept with promise to reinvigorate the primary care of patients and a necessary pillar of national health care reform. It is “a central resource... with a competent team, including a physician specialist in complex, chronic care management, and coordination and



Similarly, the Physician Charter on Professionalism articulates a “



medical error, increase patient safety, minimize overuse of health care resources, and optimize the outcomes of care.”<sup>10</sup> The ACP Ethics Manual stresses the ethical importance of active physician engagement in quality efforts and patient safety.<sup>9</sup> The PCMH, by integrating the system improvements paradigm into the practice environment, could help physicians meet these ethical obligations, although this must be done with sensitivity to the patient’s perspective. Even as the PCMH promotes “patient-centeredness,” automated processes of care could inadvertently depersonalize care and make patients feel less connected to their clinician. Importantly, the PCMH is an opportunity to help promote what patients view as measures of high quality care,<sup>24,28</sup> which include access to and continuity of care with trusted physicians;<sup>29</sup> effective communications and empathy; adequate time for office visits;<sup>30</sup> coordination of treatment across all providers and settings; decision making about treatment recommendations; and the role of the family in care.



The patient-centered medical home (PCMH) is emerging and evolving as a model for medical practice that may become an important pillar of national health care reform. The PCMH has the potential to align with the principles of medical ethics and professionalism, and presents an opportunity to reinvigorate the patient–physician relationship and the aspects of health care that patients value. This analysis has explored some of the promise of and concerns about the PCMH through the lens of ethics and professionalism. On balance, many of the principles of the PCMH resonate well with core tenets of ethics and professionalism, and in some cases provide a pathway to enhance the ethical practice of medicine. This analysis may help to highlight some of the practical choices and implications of design and implementation that should be considered to ensure that the PCMH does not become a failed fad, but rather a stepping stone towards a brighter future for health care in America.

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