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**The Schar School of Policy and Government  
George Mason University (GMU)**

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**Beyond Hippocrates  
DECLARATION OF GENEVA:  
THE PHYSICIANS PLEDGE  
2017**

Otmar Kloiber  
Secretary General  
World Medical Association



# Conflict of Interest Statement

The presenter is the Secretary General of the World Medical Association.

There are no commercial or financial interest of the presenter or the association in the work to be presented.



# Historical Policies

1948/2017 **Declaration of Geneva**  
(Physicians' Oath and 1. international code of ethics)

1964/2013 **Declaration of Helsinki**  
Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects

1975/2006 **Declaration of Tokyo**  
Guidelines for Medical Doctors concerning Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in relation to Detention and Imprisonment

1981/2017 **Declaration of Lisbon**  
The Rights of the Patient

1991/2017 **Declaration of Malta**  
Hunger Strikers

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# Declaration of Geneva

The physicians' pledge

- Created in 1948 to replace the ancient Hippocratic Oath
- codifies our values:
  - the dedication to protect and
  - to caring for patients,
  - to value life and
  - medical secrecy,
  - to avoid harm where possible and
  - to exercise our profession with conscience.

Criticized to be “old fashioned”

Attempts to replace distracted from our values turning our understanding of being a physician into that of a service provider.

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# The Declaration of Geneva

***Adopted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the World Medical Association, Geneva, Switzerland, September 1948  
and amended by the 22<sup>nd</sup> World Medical Assembly, Sydney, Australia, August 1968  
and the 35<sup>th</sup> World Medical Assembly, Venice, Italy, October 1983  
and the 46<sup>th</sup> WMA General Assembly, Stockholm, Sweden, September 1994  
and editorially revised by the 170<sup>th</sup> WMA Council Session, Divonne-les-Bains, France, May 2005  
and the 173<sup>rd</sup> WMA Council Session, Divonne-les-Bains, France, May 2006  
and amended by the 68<sup>th</sup> WMA General Assembly, Chicago, United States, October 2017***

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# Declaration of Geneva

Revising or not?

1. Change only where necessary and improving the document
2. Staying with values
3. Maintaining the format

Process:

2015: A workgroup was charged to examine the need for a review

2016: Internal survey – preparing amendments

2017: Discussing amendments in an open process

# Surveying our members

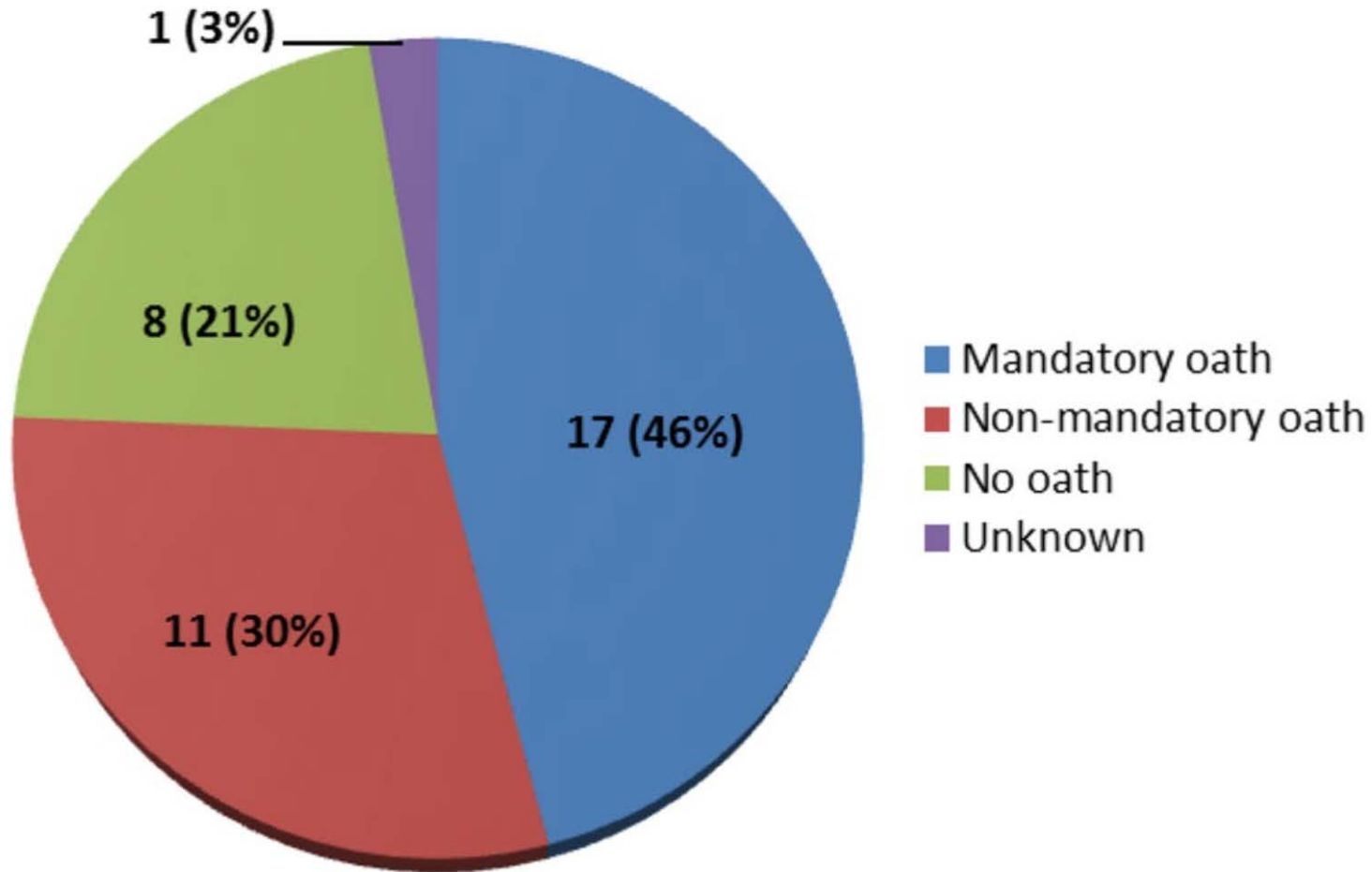
Zoé Rheinsberg, Ramin Parsa-Parsi, Otmar Kloiber & Urban Wiesing:

**Medical oath: use and relevance of the  
Declaration of Geneva.**

**A survey of member organizations of the  
World Medical Association (WMA)**

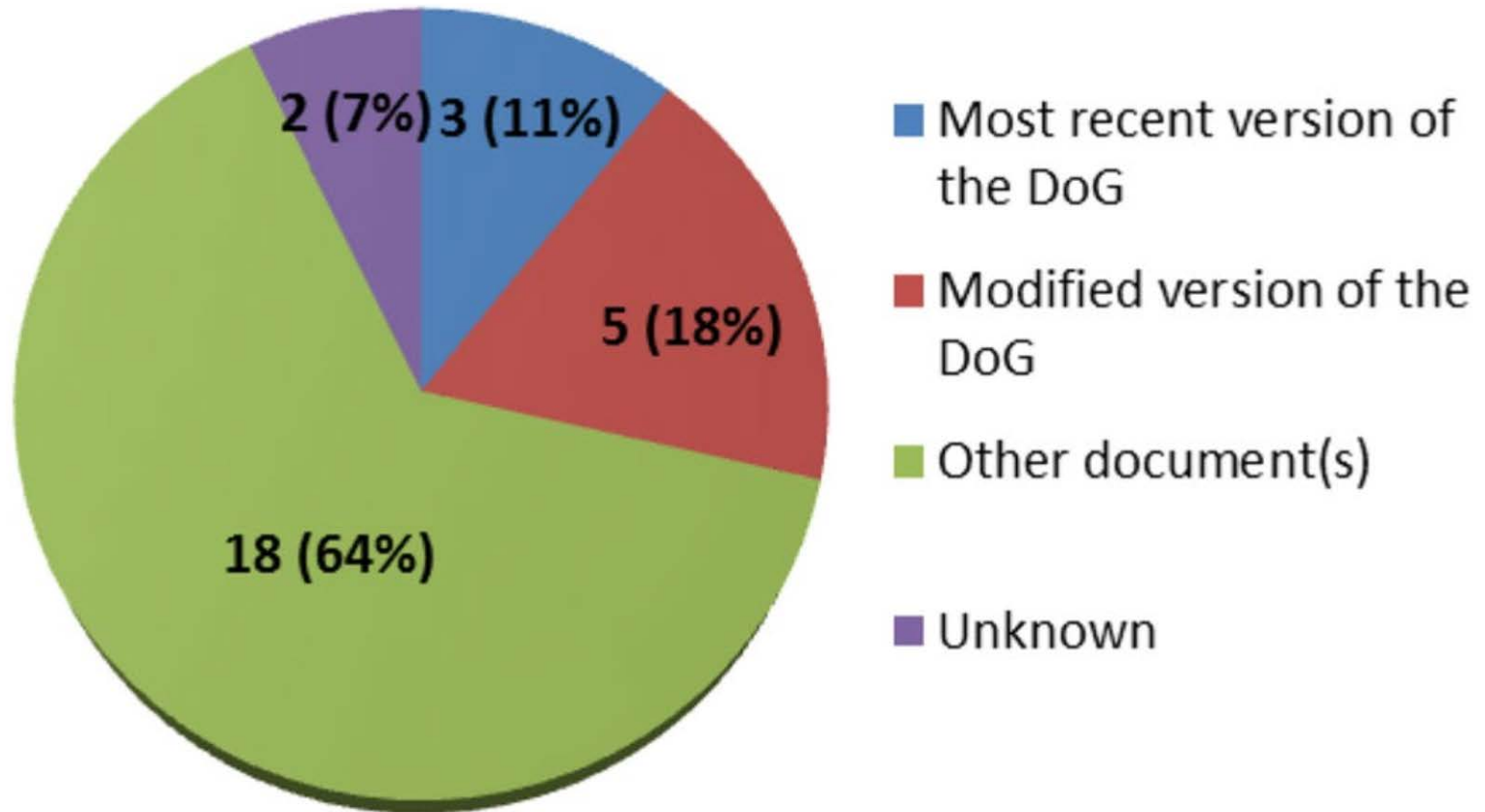


# Who is promising?



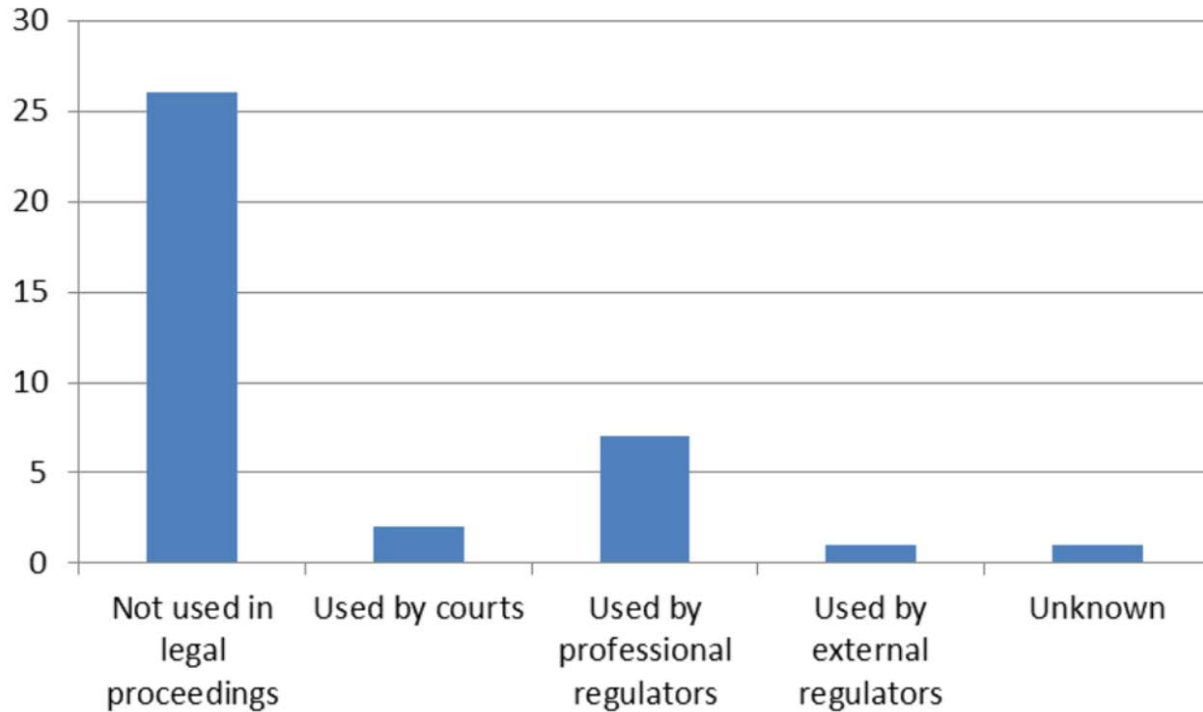
**Fig. 1** Oaths for physicians (n = 37), proportions in %

# Which text?



**Fig. 2** Oath texts used (n = 28), proportions in %

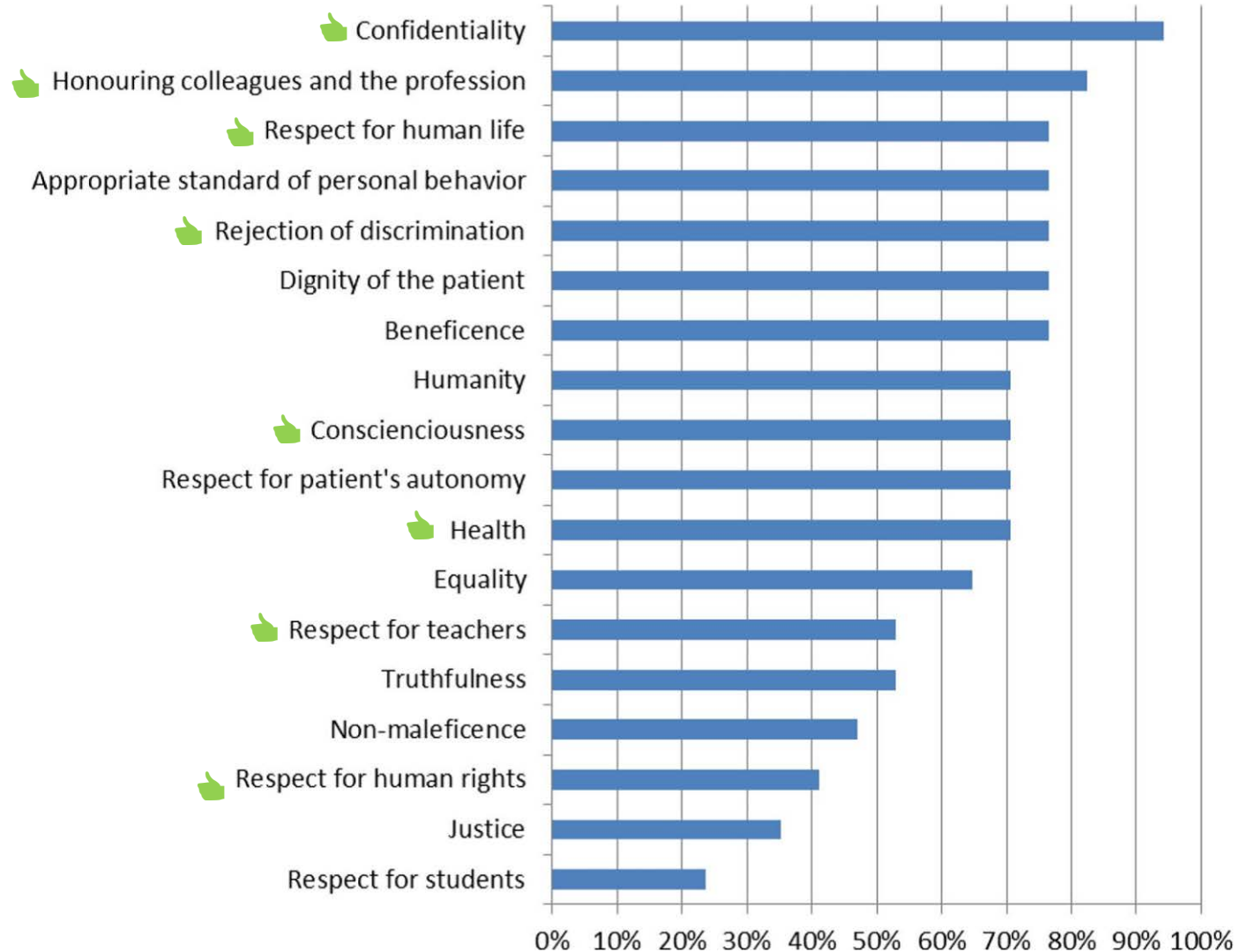
# Somebody listens?



Is the pledge still relevant?

# The Geneva Declaration compared

Ethical principles in  
other pledges  
(N=17)



# Should there be only one pledge for all physicians?

## STAT

**So long, Hippocrates. Medical students choose their own oaths**



*Matt Rourke/AP* Thomas Jefferson University medical students take the Hippocratic oath during a white coat ceremony.

<https://www.statnews.com/2016/09/21/hippocratic-oath-medical-students-doctors/> 25.09.2016

# Should there be only one pledge for all physicians?

- The Pluralism of views and believes in this world and the diversity of cultures demands a common moral basis building on fundamental principles.
- Common fundamental norms, regulating professional conduct are the bases of integrity and the public trust in the profession.

# Which pledge?

- The Declaration of Geneva, but
  - Not enough use by member organizations
  - Not relevant? Yet: high communality in aims and principles
  - Insufficient distribution? Yet: often quoted
  - Explicit recognition of patient autonomy is missing

# Who should be the owner of the pledge?

- The global community of physicians
- A task of the World Medical Association
- Not in opposition to society, but in responsibility for it



# Changes adopted in Chicago



General Assembly

Chicago 11- 14 October 2017

- Respect for patient autonomy (shared decision making, but not to diminish conscience)
- To share information in teaching or publication and to give due respect to teachers, colleagues, and students.
- To exercise the profession according to the standards of medicine,
- To care for your own health and well-being which also means to lead by example

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# The revised Declaration of Geneva

## The Physician's Pledge

AS A MEMBER OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION:

I SOLEMNLY PLEDGE to dedicate my life to the service of humanity;

THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MY PATIENT will be my first consideration;

I WILL RESPECT the autonomy and dignity of my patient;

I WILL MAINTAIN the utmost respect for human life;

I WILL NOT PERMIT considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene between my duty and my patient;

I WILL RESPECT the secrets that are confided in me, even after the patient has died;

I WILL PRACTISE my profession with conscience and dignity and in accordance with good medical practice;

I WILL FOSTER the honour and noble traditions of the medical profession;

I WILL GIVE to my teachers, colleagues, and students the respect and gratitude that is their due;

I WILL SHARE my medical knowledge for the benefit of the patient and the advancement of healthcare;

I WILL ATTEND TO my own health, well-being, and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard;

I WILL NOT USE my medical knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties, even under threat;

I MAKE THESE PROMISES solemnly, freely, and upon my honour.

*Caring,  
Ethics,  
Science*



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