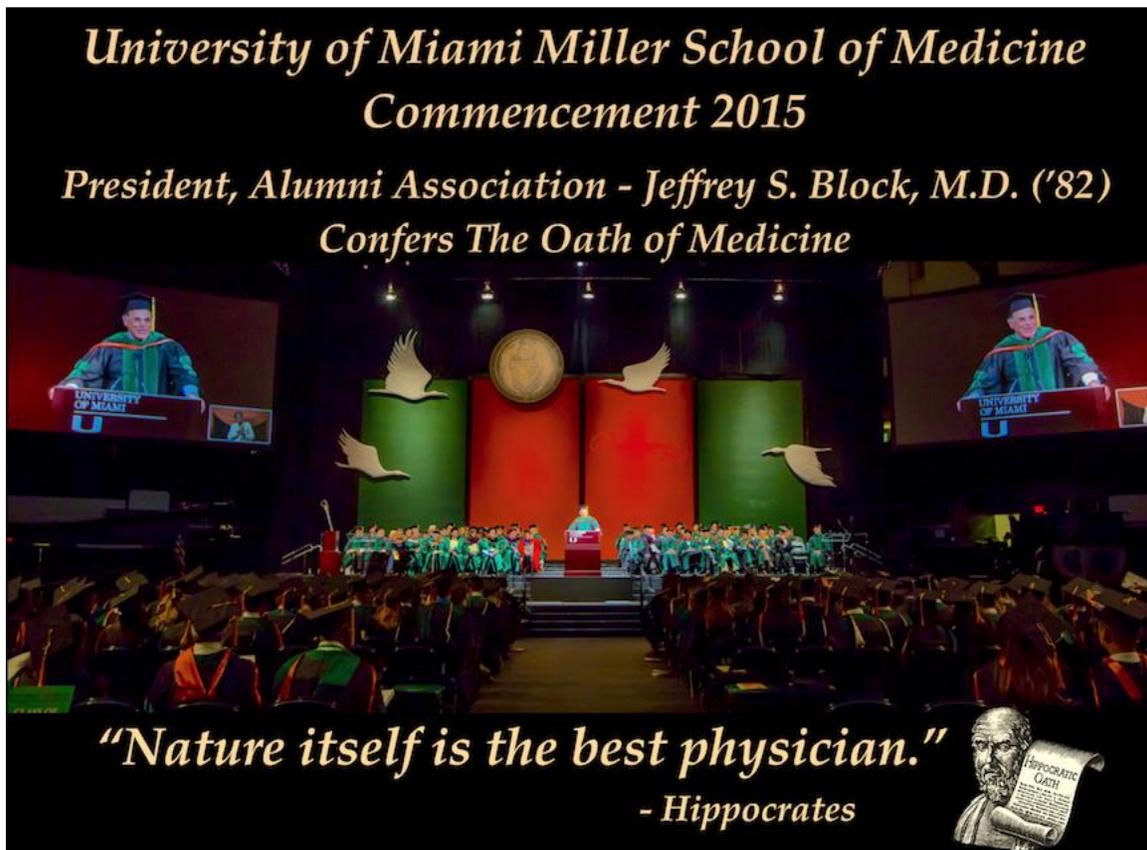




**The Oath Upon Being Conferred the Privilege to Practice Medicine**  
**by Jeffrey S. Block, M.D.**



### **The Greek Tradition of an Oath**

[Lycurgus of Athens](#) (d. 324 BCE) is credited with documenting that "it is the oath which holds democracy together", religion, morality and political organization had been linked by the oath, and the oath and its prerequisite altar had become the basis of both civil and criminal, as well as international law.

The *Hippocratic Oath* is an oath historically taken by physicians and physician assistants. It is one of the most widely known of Greek medical texts. It requires a new physician to uphold specific ethical standards.

This oath is considered a rite of passage for practitioners of medicine. Scholars widely believe that Hippocrates often called the father of medicine in Western culture.

**Hippocratic Oath** (modern version rev. 1964)

*"I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:*

*I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.*

*I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.*

*I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.*

*I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.*

*I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.*

*I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.*

*I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.*

*I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.*

*If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.*

### **The Jewish Tradition of an Oath:**

The Oath of Maimonides is a traditional oath for physicians attributed to Maimonides. It is not to be confused with the more extensive Prayer of Maimonides. It is often used as an alternative to the **Hippocratic Oath**.

**Oath of Maimonides** is a traditional oath for physicians attributed to Maimonides, often used as an alternative to the Hippocratic Oath and was administered to UM Medical graduating medical upon admission to the profession (Block, 1982).

*"The eternal providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love for my art actuate me at all time; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children.*

*May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain.*

*Grant me the strength, time and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is immense and the spirit of man can extend indefinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements. Today he can discover his errors of yesterday and tomorrow he can obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today.*

*Oh, God, Thou has appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation and now I turn unto my calling."*

## The Contemporary Oath:

**Declaration of Geneva** is the oath currently administered by the President of the Medical Alumni Association and The Dean of the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine to new medical doctors at their graduation's commencement exercise upon entering the profession.

This oath has been modified numerous times. One of the most significant revisions was first drafted in 1948 by the World Medical Association (WMA). During the post-World War II and immediately after its foundation, the WMA showed concern over the state of medical ethics in general and over the world. The WMA took up the responsibility for setting ethical guidelines for the world physicians:

*"I solemnly pledge to consecrate my life to the service of humanity;  
I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude that is their due;  
I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity;  
The health of my patient will be my first consideration;  
I will respect the secrets that are confided in me, even after the patient has died;  
I will maintain by all the means in my power, the honor and the noble traditions of the  
medical profession;  
My colleagues will be my sisters and brothers;  
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 maintain the utmost respect for human life;  
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 honor.*

### ***"First", or "Above All Do No Harm."***

Smith, C. M. (2005). "Origin and Uses of *Primum Non Nocere* — Above All, Do No Harm!". *The Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 45 (4): 371-377. doi:10.1177/0091270004273680.

Abstract:

The so-called Hippocratic injunction to do no harm has been an axiom central to clinical pharmacology and to the education of medical and graduate students. With the recent reexamination of the nature and magnitude of adverse reactions to drugs, the purposes of this research and review were to discover the origin of this unique Latin expression. It has been reported that the author was neither Hippocrates nor Galen. Searches of writings back to the Middle Ages have uncovered the appearance of the axiom as expressed in English, coupled with its unique Latin, in 1860, with attribution to the English physician, Thomas Sydenham. Commonly used in the late 1800s into the early decades of the 1900s, it was nearly exclusively transmitted orally; it rarely appeared in print in the early 20th century. Its applicability and limitations as a guide to the ethical practice of medicine and pharmacological research are discussed. Despite insufficiencies, it remains a potent reminder that every medical and pharmacological decision carries the potential for harm.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/labs/articles/15778417/>

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