

Conflicts of interest. Physician ownership of medical facilities. Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, American Medical Association.

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In this report, the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs revisits the question of referral of patients to medical facilities in which physicians have financial interests ("self-referral"). The Council issued safeguards in 1986 to prevent abuses of self-referral and most recently updated the guidelines in 1989. Recent studies, however, have suggested that problems with self-referral persist; these problems undermine the commitment of physicians to professionalism. The Council has concluded that, in general, physicians should not refer patients to a health care facility outside their office practice at which they do not directly provide care or services when they have an investment interest in the facility. Physicians may invest in and refer to an outside facility if there is a demonstrated need in the community for the facility and alternative financing is not available.