In order that medical record students and new members of the medical record profession may be assisted in determining the rightness or wrongness of conduct according to conscience and reason in matters relating to the practice of medical record science, an interpretation, citing specific examples of the kinds of acts that should be governed by principles of ethics, has been prepared. To facilitate its use, this elaboration of the Code of Ethics has been classified according to the particular relationships involved.

Relation to the Patient

1. As a member of one of the health professions, the medical record practitioner should measure the propriety of his actions and decisions by the primary consideration of their effect on the patient’s health and welfare. (Code No. 1)

2. It is an obligation to maintain complete and accurate records to meet the health and related needs of the patient. (Codes No. 1 and 2)

3. The patient has a right to feel confident that the privileged information contained in his medical record will be kept confidential unless he waives the privilege, or release of the information is compelled by statute, regulation or other legal means. (Code No.2)

4. Release of non-privileged information should be in accordance with the best interests of the patient. For example, providing lists of patients for commercial use is not ordinarily a proper function of a hospital, and should not be done by a medical record practitioner without approval of the administrator. Acceptance of fees for such lists is not considered ethical. (Codes No. 1 and 7)

5. Receipt of gratuities for rendering services to patients which are furnished as a part of the service of the hospital is not considered ethical. Fees for services are acceptable only when policy to do so has been established by the employing agency and accounts of receipt maintained for inspection, and the funds so received used for the hospital rather than the personal gain of an individual. (Code No.7)

6. Since service to patients is the motivating force behind the profession of medical record science, it is considered ethical to practice in any institution, clinic, nursing home, or health agency engaged in
the care of patients as long as the professional practice therein is considered ethical by the medical profession and/or licensing authority. It would be unethical to practice in any environment wherein fraud is perpetrated on the patient, as, for example, clinics engaged in fraudulent cancer cures. (Code No. 1)

7. It is considered unethical to participate in any collective refusal to work in a medical care facility, since to do so could jeopardize the welfare of patients. (Code No. 1)

Relation to Employer

In his relation with any employer, the medical record practitioner shall:

1. State truthfully and accurately his credentials, professional education and experience. Only that education obtained as an enrolled student in a college, university, school of nursing, school for medical record personnel or comparable educational program can be claimed as professional education. Apprentice service, on-the-job training, and the like, must be claimed as experience, not formal education. (Code No. 12)

2. Administer the department entrusted to him in a responsible manner and render always a truthful accounting of the status of the departmental activities. Concealment of inability to keep required files and indexes current, or of practices not in accordance with established policies, rules and regulations adopted by the medical staff and/or the administration, or any other matter that properly should be brought to the attention of the administrator, chief of staff, or other designated authority, is considered unethical. (Codes Nos. 3, 4, 5)

3. Give due notice of intent to vacate his position. The length of time considered to be sufficient advance notice should be commensurate with the degree of responsibility vested in the position. (Code No. 3)

4. Become fully informed of and comply with all ethical policies, procedures and regulations of the employing agency. (Codes No. 2 and 3)

5. Refuse to participate in any improper alteration in or suppression of medical records duly maintained as part of the operation of the employing agency. (Codes No. 2 and 4)

6. Accept no gratuities from attorneys, insurance company representatives or others, for services performed as a part of the regular functions of the medical record department. (Code No. 4)

Relation to the Medical Staff

As a member of a paramedical profession which has as a primary function the rendering of services to physicians in order to enable them to devote their time to their professional activities, the medical record practitioner has certain obligations to the medical staff. He shall:
1. Have knowledge of and abide by the ethics of the medical profession insofar as his activities are bound by these principles. (Codes Nos. 2, 6, 8)

2. Accept the obligation to assist the medical staff in programs related to patient care, education, research and committee work. (Codes Nos. 1 and 3)

3. Abstain from revealing or discussing observations, comments or findings concerning the practices of individual physicians resulting from committee activities such as the medical audit committee, tissue committee, and the like, or obtained from any other source except to the designated appropriate authority of the institution. (Codes Nos. 5 and 6)

4. Report to the proper authorities but to no one else any evidence of conduct or practice of a member of the medical profession as revealed in the record or otherwise disclosed to him that suggests possible violation of established rules and regulations of the institution or of professional practice. (Codes Nos. 5 and 6)

5. Refrain from making decisions or expressing opinions or performing functions that require medical determinations. This includes alteration of diagnoses as recorded by the physician, taking medical histories that are required to be done by a physician, offering advice on diagnosis or therapy to any individual and similar encroachments on the practice of medicine. (Code No. 8)

6. Serve all members of the medical staff with equal respect, interest, courtesy and efficiency. (Codes Nos. 1 and 3)

7. Accept no gratuities from the medical staff for services that are performed as a part of the regular functions of the medical record department. When performing extracurricular duties for physicians involving the copying or abstracting of medical records for his personal use, make no additions or modifications that alter the officially recorded data. (Codes Nos. 1 and 4)

Relation to the Medical Record Profession

The medical record practitioner has an obligation to conduct himself in the practice of his profession so as to bring honor to that profession. In addition to the ethical practices related directly to patients, to employers, and to the medical and other professional staffs, he should:

1. Assist in the education of fellow practitioners and make provision for professional growth and development of those under his supervision. (Code No. 10)

2. Actively recruit students for professional training, as long as the need exists. (Code No. 10)

3. Promote advancement in the knowledge and practice of medical record science by participating in studies and research projects in areas related to medical record practices by objective analysis of existing practices and procedures, and by making available to others information concerning new methods and procedures. (Code No. 9)

4. Improve his own knowledge and skills by reading pertinent literature, attending workshops,
institutes, and other educational programs. (Code No. 9)

5. Promote understanding of the profession in his community. (Code No. 10)

6. Accord his colleagues the same respect and fraternal cooperation he expects to receive from them. He should refrain from expressing opinions and judgments on matters pertaining to the professional performance of others except through established channels, i.e., his administrative superior, if a fellow employee, or the Executive Director of the American Medical Record Association, if he wishes to question the qualifications of a member of the Association. (Codes No. 1 and 5)

Relation to Professional Society — (The American Medical Record Association)

In his relations with the American Medical Record Association, a member must:

1. State truthfully and accurately his credentials, professional education and experience. Only that education that is obtained as an enrolled student in a college, university, school of nursing or approved school for medical record personnel or other comparable education program can be claimed as professional education. Apprentice service, on-the-job training, and the like, must be claimed as experience, not formal education. (Code No. 12)

2. Perform conscientiously the duties of any Association office to which elected or committee assignment to which appointed. If unforeseen circumstances prevent the member from carrying out his responsibilities after he has accepted office or committee appointment, he should offer his resignation. (Code No. 11)

3. Preserve the confidential nature of information obtained as an officer, a member of the Executive Board or as a member of a committee. This obligation persists after the termination of office or committee membership. For example, all proceedings of the Executive Board are confidential and may not be disclosed without specific authority of the Board. Similarly, evaluations of potential nominees made available to the Nominating Committee may under no circumstances be disclosed. (Code No. 11)