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APA Commends AMA's Commitment to Review Ethics on Interrogation

Arlington, Va. – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) commends the American Medical Association's House of Delegates vote on Monday committing the AMA to review the issue of physician participation in the interrogation of prisoners and detainees and to clearly delineate the boundaries of ethical practice.

In June 2005, following troubling news accounts of alleged violations of professional medical ethics at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other U.S. military sites, the APA announced it would work to create specific, unambiguous guidelines for psychiatrists and other physicians with respect to interrogation.

“Physicians’ Hippocratic training and our profound ethical obligations bar participating in any form of cruel and degrading treatment,” said John S. “Jack” McIntyre, M.D., chair of the APA delegation to the AMA House. “The American Psychiatric Association is firmly committed to using our medical expertise to help treat and heal those in our care. It is vital for physicians to have clear guidelines with respect to interrogation from the AMA, the nation’s leading authority on the ethics of medical practice.”

The resolution passed by the AMA, “Physician Participation in the Interrogation of Prisoners and Detainees,” was jointly introduced by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Academy of Pediatrics and is strongly supported by the APA.

“Personally, I have serious concerns about the nature of physician participation described in many of the recent reports,” said David Fassler, M.D., APA trustee at large and author of the resolution. “However, I recognize that there are a variety of perspectives on this issue, which is why I feel the AMA is the appropriate venue for a thoughtful, inclusive and comprehensive analysis of this complex and controversial topic.”

Among other APA activities on this subject matter:

- APA President Steven S. Sharfstein, M.D., recently traveled to Guantanamo Bay to urge U.S. military and defense officials to exclude psychiatrists from participating in any way in the interrogation of detainees. He was accompanied by representatives of several medical and professional organizations, including the AMA.

- The APA staunchly supports U.S. Senator John McCain’s proposal – an amendment to the Department of Defense appropriations bill – to prohibit cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees.
- The APA Assembly will convene this weekend in Washington, D.C., and will consider a new position statement on the issue, reinforcing the psychiatric profession’s dedication “to providing competent medical care with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.”

The AMA guidelines will be prepared by the AMA’s Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs.

To view the AMA resolution, visit:

<http://www.psych.org/downloads/AMAResolution1Nov05.pdf>

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in research, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.healthyminds.org.

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