

## **AAEM Statement on Forensic Searches**

The American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) upholds the highest standards of patient care, emphasizing medical ethics and the physician-patient relationship. Emergency physicians must act in patients' best interests, respecting patient autonomy, beneficence and the duty to provide the best possible patient care. This statement addresses concerns about law enforcement requests, even with court orders, for invasive procedures like body cavity searches on unwilling patients.

### **Patient Autonomy and Ethical Boundaries**

AAEM asserts that competent patients have the right to refuse medical procedures, including body cavity searches. Physicians should not be compelled to perform such procedures at law enforcement's request, as it conflicts with their role as healers and undermines medical ethical principles and the physician-patient relationship.

### **Legal Orders vs. Medical Ethics**

Court orders do not override ethical obligations. Physicians must retain clinical independence and should not conduct forensic procedures without patient consent. Forensic procedures on competent individuals, including body cavity searches, carry risks, including physical harm and psychological trauma, which cannot be justified when no medical benefit exists.

### **Physician Discretion and Advocacy**

AAEM supports emergency physicians' right to refuse non-therapeutic procedures that violate medical ethics. Physicians should document patient refusal, explain the ethical conflict, and direct law enforcement to forensic facilities. AAEM encourages collaboration with legal authorities to reinforce that physicians are not obligated to perform these procedures and advocates for policies that protect patient rights, professional integrity, and ethical obligations.

### **Conclusion**

AAEM strongly opposes involuntary forensic procedures, including body cavity searches, in emergency settings, even under court order. Such actions are unethical, compromise patient dignity and threaten the physician-patient relationship. Physicians, healthcare institutions, and policymakers must uphold ethical principles and resist external pressures that conflict with medical duty.