The emergency physician's principal legal and ethical responsibility is to patients who present to be seen and treated in the emergency department (ED). The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) believes that:

- An emergency physician must be available at all times to respond to emergency department patients in a timely and safe manner while formally assigned as an attending in the ED.
- It is the responsibility of the hospital administration and the organized medical staff to assure adequate medical care for those emergency situations that occur in other hospital departments and areas.
- Hospital medical emergency response plans and teams should be organized in a manner that is not reliant upon an emergency physician unless the ED and its patients' medical needs can be safely provided for at all times.
- Emergency physicians shall have adequate legal protection when responding to in-hospital emergencies outside the ED.