

Pope urges doctors to respect patients' value, dignity

VATICAN CITY – Whether a patient wants physicians to do everything possible to save his or her life or simply wants ordinary care, doctors must form a “therapeutic alliance” with each patient, Pope Benedict XVI said.

So many diseases today are treatable and even curable that there is a risk of abandoning patients “the moment one senses the impossibility of obtaining appreciable results,” the pope said Oct. 20 in a meeting with the Italian Society of Surgeons.

The society met the pope during its annual convention in Rome.

Pope Benedict told the surgeons that every patient, even those who are incurably ill, have value and have a dignity that must be honored.

“Respect for human dignity, in fact, requires unconditional respect for every single human being, born or unborn, healthy or ill, in any condition,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict said an effective therapeutic plan – one that leads the patient to serenity and hope – can be formulated only when a physician truly listens to the patient and understands his or her history and family life.

Whether the patient chooses “bold lifesaving interventions” or decides “to be content with the ordinary measures medicine offers,” mutual respect must characterize the patient-physician relationship, he said.

A patient, the pope said, “wants to be looked at with kindness, not just examined; he wants to be heard, not just subjected to sophisticated tests; he wants to be certain that he is in the mind and heart of the doctor treating him.”