

State University of New York Downstate Medical Center
College of Medicine

PROFESSIONALISM

DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism: A physician professes both knowledge and expertise, accompanied by a moral code of conduct toward his or her patients and colleagues. Professionalism encompasses a number of virtues expressed in the following attitudes resulting in specific behaviors. These include:

Excellence: a desire to maintain a standard of knowledge and competence that exceeds ordinary expectations, and includes a commitment to lifelong learning. Some examples of behaviors that exhibit excellence include:

- a. Contributing to an atmosphere of learning
- b. Putting forth effort which goes beyond what is needed solely for the purpose of achieving a grade in a course
- c. Not exhibiting anti-intellectual attitudes and behaviors
- d. Not making decisions on the basis of inadequate knowledge

Altruism: readiness to place the interests of others above one's own. Some behaviors exhibiting altruism include:

- a. Sacrificing one's own time and energy for the sake of others' needs
- b. Accepting inconvenience to meet the needs of one's patients
- c. Accommodating patients' and families' special needs for comfort and help
- d. Volunteering one's skills and expertise for the welfare of the community

Compassion: sympathy combined with a desire to correct the cause of the problem. Some examples of compassion include:

- a. Recognizing the needs of a patient without being specifically told
- b. Appreciating the patients' and families' special needs for comfort and help
- c. Doing all that you can to meet the needs of the patient

Duty: preparedness to behave conscientiously or reliably and responsibly with respect to rules and schedules. Some behaviors which exhibit a sense of duty include:

- a. Being available and responsive when "on call"
- b. Reporting on time
- c. Completing paperwork and assigned tasks
- d. Fulfilling responsibilities

Accountability: accepting responsibility for one's behavior toward patients, colleagues, the profession, and the public. Some examples of accountability include:

- a. Accepting constructive feedback and incorporating it to make changes in behavior
- b. Recognizing limitations and seeking help

- c. Not working in an impaired state
- d. Protecting patient confidentiality

Honor and Integrity: “honor” is the consistent regard for the highest standards of behavior and “integrity” is the refusal to violate the code of professionalism. Possessing honor and integrity implies being fair, being truthful, keeping one’s word, meeting commitments and being straightforward. In addition to upholding these standards oneself, one is obligated to encourage professionalism on the part of one's colleagues and report lapses in professional conduct on the part of others. Some examples of lack of honor and integrity include:

- a. Cheating, plagiarism, forgery, and sabotage
- b. Falsification of patient histories or records
- c. Misrepresentation

Respect: readiness to treat others – including patients, colleagues and faculty – with consideration for their rights and interests. For example:

- a. Establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries in work and learning situations
- b. Respecting others regardless of personal bias
- c. Dressing in an appropriate manner
- d. Using professional language and being mindful of the environment
- e. Resolving conflicts in a manner that respects the dignity of every person involved
- f. Demonstrating personal commitment to honoring the choices and rights of other persons, especially regarding their medical care
- g. Listening to other members of the health care team and taking their opinions into account

Violations of the professionalism standards, as described by the definitions above, are referred to the Academic Promotions Committee for review and further action.