

PROFESSIONALISM IN MEDICINE

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Professionalism makes the medical profession unique in the context of respect and honour. The concept of medical professionalism includes the following values: honesty, altruism, service, commitment, communication, accountability, life-long learning, confidentiality, and medical ethics. According to Epstein and Hundert, "Medical professionalism is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served." The American Board of Internal Medicine also describes medical professionalism as the attitudes and behaviors that serve to maintain patient interest over physician self-interest.

This concept of medical professionalism emerged back in the 1990s in the United States. Their health care system slowly began to be seen as a business for profit. As a result, efficacy was prioritized over compassion. Professionalism arose to reintroduce humanistic qualities back to the medical profession. This was a necessity to reinforce sound ethical principles in the medical field.

There are several distinct commitments that a doctor should follow to maintain his or her professionalism. A doctor should make a commitment to the highest standards of excellence and the generation and dissemination of knowledge. A doctor must make a commitment to sustain the interests and welfare of his or her patients. Finally, doctors should always be responsive to the health care needs of society.

There are certain characteristics that can be found in professional conduct. Altruism is the basis of professionalism. A physician should always be looking out for patients and their interests. Accountability is essential, as a reliable physician puts everybody at ease. Excellence is a necessity

as well, as doctors have to be the best of the best to ensure no lives are squandered. There will be many situations where doctors will have to work overtime. It is their sense of duty that keeps them going, and it is paramount that physicians strive to achieve excellence even when they're tired. They must do so, as lives depend on it. Honor and Integrity also make up a vital part of medical professionalism. A deceitful physician can cause a lot of harm in the workplace. Finally, a physician must also be respectful of others. Even when they're troubled, doctors must maintain their integrity and be fair to all.

When the medical workplace lacks professionalism, many unethical acts can be observed. Without professionalism, a physician can abuse their power, and they can abuse or harass patients and even breach their confidentiality. Physicians can also display an alarming sense of arrogance. Greed can corrupt many doctors and lead them astray if they do not embrace professionalism. Misrepresentation can be seen as well, as a physician can lie to mislead patients or their colleagues. If a physician is disabled or impaired, he or she cannot provide proper service. In that situation, he or she must step down. If a physician also fails to fulfill all of his or her responsibilities, then they are at fault. Finally, conflicts of interest can get in the way of a job. Self-promotion, unethical collaboration with industry, misuse of services, overcharging, and inappropriate treatment of patients are all examples of this. These are some reasons as to why professionalism is needed in medicine, as the situation is simply chaotic without it.

To uphold medical professionalism, doctors have certain duties and roles in the medical system. The patients also have certain rights that must always be respected. Patients have the following rights in the health care system: high quality medical service, autonomous choice, privacy, dignity, information, and health education. A physician has a duty to promote and protect the patient's health. Physicians also have a duty to confidentiality and to respect the patient's privacy, dignity, and autonomy. Therefore, they must understand the health care system and their clinical responsibilities. They should appreciate their roles as a researcher, mentor, or teacher.

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Furthermore, a physician must also be open to personal development. They have to teach themselves new things as the years go on. They should be self-aware of their own competence. They should also take care of themselves and ensure they have proper time management skills. Finally, physicians must also have the proper motivation.

Medical students should be well versed in professionalism from the very beginning. Before that, however, there are certain commitments students should have as well. They should have respect for professors, peers, guest speakers, and patients. They should appreciate the respect cadavers and anatomical specimens. They should have respect for the institution they are a part of and have respect for the health care team. Finally, they should understand the core values of professionalism.

To accomplish this, professionalism must be incorporated in the curriculum. Role modeling and bed side teaching are great ways to introduce professionalism to students. Simulated patients can also help tremendously, and small group discussions are incredibly beneficial. Professional values are a necessity in the medical field, and students must learn them. There are many values such as honor and integrity that the students can develop themselves. They will also be taught some values through the formal curriculum and by watching role models. Professionalism must be assessed to ensure students have a proper grasp on it. Written, oral, or computer based tests show that the student has the knowledge (Fig 1). However, they might not apply it properly, so that is why their performance must be assessed as well.

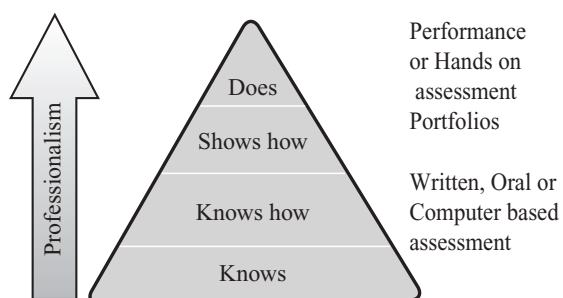


Fig 1 : Miller's Triangle

Professionalism can be assessed in a myriad of ways. Simulated patients, direct observation, portfolios, OSCE, and 360 degree evaluations are great ways to assess it. A 360 degree evaluation involves the entire health care team. The patient, peers, sisters, and other health care professionals will contribute to the assessment.

Currently, there are a number of problems threatening professionalism and its place in medicine. A questioning society often puts too much blame on doctors. Sometimes, physicians can violate the code of conduct and abuse their power. Lack of humanism can lead to cruel, apathetic doctors who are only interested in the money. Finally, failure of the professionals to meet their obligations can also cause distrust among patients.

In conclusion, professionalism is an integral part of medicine. It is an important component of medicine's contract to society. It should be maintained through a proper code of conduct. A well-functioning regulating body must be in charge to protect medical professionalism. Finally, it should be part of the formal curriculum; the students must learn the true value of medical professionalism. Professionalism should always be relevant to society.

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