

Professionalism in Medicine

The Elements of Professionalism as Defined by the American Board of Internal Medicine

- Altruism:** The essence of professionalism, in which the best interest of the patients, not self-interest, is the rule.
- Accountability:** To patients-honoring the patient/physician relationship. To society-addressing the health needs of the public. To the profession-adhering to medicine's ethical precepts.
- Excellence:** A commitment to life-long learning and to exceed “ordinary expectations.”
- Duty:** Free acceptance of a commitment to service (e.g., enduring unavoidable risks in the care of patients and advocating best care regardless of ability to pay).
- Honor and integrity:** Consistent regard for the highest standards of behavior and the refusal to violate one's personal or professional codes.
- Respect for others:** Including patients, families, other physicians, and health care professionals.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics

- I.** A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.
- II.** A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions, and strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence, or engaging in fraud or deception, to appropriate entities.
- III.** A physician shall respect the law and also recognize a responsibility to seek changes in those requirements which are contrary to the best interests of the patient.
- IV.** A physician shall respect the rights of patients, colleagues, and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences and privacy within the constraints of the law.
- V.** A physician shall continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge, maintain a commitment to medical education, make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and the public, obtain consultation, and use the talents of other health professionals when indicated.
- VI.** A physician shall, in the provision of appropriate patient care, except in emergencies, be free to choose whom to serve, with whom to associate, and the environment in which to provide medical care.
- VII.** A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community and the betterment of public health.
- VIII.** A physician shall, while caring for a patient, regard responsibility to the patient as paramount.
- IX.** A physician shall support access to medical care for all people.

TOP 10 EXAMPLES OF UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR

- 1.** *Intellectual or personal dishonesty.* Examples include fabrication of research results and laboratory values, failure to follow through on assignments, plagiarism, and cheating on examinations.
- 2.** *Arrogance and disrespectfulness.* These undesirable character traits typically result from the student or resident's inappropriate sense of entitlement.
- 3.** *Prejudice on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation.*
- 4.** *Abrasive interactions with patients and coworkers.* These negative interactions usually spring from the physician's exaggerated sense of self-importance and his/her sense that no one else's time or schedule is as demanding or as important.
- 5.** *Lack of accountability for medical errors and administrative oversights.* Specifically, the student or physician fails to demonstrate sufficient personal investment in the patient's outcome. Clearly, we do not want physicians to so clearly identify with the patient that they lose all objectivity and become unable to act decisively and thoughtfully. However, we also do not want physicians to ascribe every adverse outcome to "stuff happens!" We want our trainees to acknowledge their errors to themselves and to their patients, learn from their errors, and then move on to an improved state of practice.
- 6.** *Fiscal irresponsibility.* This type of behavior might include ordering expensive and clinically unnecessary laboratory tests, accepting "kick-backs" for referrals for selected diagnostic studies, or inequitably distributing benefits and income within a partnership.
- 7.** *Lack of sustained commitment to self-learning.* More than almost any other profession, medicine requires lifelong learning. We may not need to be the first to adopt a new treatment or intervention, but we certainly do not want to be the last to give up an old and outdated practice.
- 8.** *Lack of due diligence.* This undesirable behavior may be manifested by carelessness, laziness, inattention to detail, and failure to follow through on management plans.
- 9.** *Personal excesses.* Examples of this negative behavior include substance abuse, high-stakes gambling leading to financial ruin, and reckless high-risk behavior.
- 10.** *Sexual misconduct.* This adverse behavior might include inappropriate sexual remarks/advances or relationships with patients, coworkers, and students.