Professionalism in Medicine
Objectives

- Define key elements of professionalism.
- Review ways to promote professionalism.
- Consider challenges to professionalism and ways to remedy or avoid.
Definition

- Professionalism: A commitment to carry out professional responsibilities, adhere to ethical principles, and demonstrate sensitivity to a diverse patient population.

ACGME Bulletin, October 1999; www.abimfoundation.org
Evaluations

Measure

- Clinical Judgment
- Medical Knowledge
- Professionalism
- Overall Clinical Competence
- Medical Care
- Clinical skills
- Humanistic Qualities

E.g. - Integrity, respect, compassion, empathy, trustworthy, rapport with families.

E.g. – Accountability, integrity; organized, punctual and cooperative.
Categories of Professionalism

1. Physician Accountability
2. Humanistic Qualities
3. Physician Impairment
4. Professional Ethics
Physician Accountability

- To patients: fulfilling implied contract for physician-patient relationship.
- To society: addressing health needs of public.
- To the profession: adhering to medicine’s time-honored ethical precepts.

Physician Accountability

- Excellence: conscientious effort to exceed ordinary expectations.
  - Commitment to scholarship.
- Apply appropriate judgment, art and values learned from mentors/role model clinicians.

Humanistic Qualities

- Duty: commitment to service.
  - Patient welfare is the primary concern.
  - Being available and responsive when on-call.
  - Active role in professional organizations.

- Altruism: placing needs of patient ahead of physician’s self-interest.

- Respect for others: patients, families and colleagues.

- Appropriate attitude and behavior toward colleagues.
*Humanistic Qualities*

- Integrity, respect, compassion and sensitivity to patient’s needs.
  - Accepting inconvenience to meet patients’ needs.
  - Advocating best possible care regardless of patient’s ability to pay.
  - Volunteering skills and expertise for community’s welfare.
Physician Impairment

- Recognize and manage impairment in yourself and others.
- Impairment includes substance abuse, alcohol, depression, dementia, and other mental, emotional and physical disorders.

- LSUHSC Campus Assistance Program
  - Active intervention.
  - Available to all programs, faculty, residents and students.
Professional Ethics

- Honor and Integrity: Fairness, truthfulness and keeping one’s word.
  - Meet commitments.
  - Be straightforward.
  - Recognize and avoid relationships that cause conflicts of interest and allow personal gain to supersede patient's best interest.
  - Respect patient privacy and confidentiality.
Professional Ethics

- Maintain high standard of behavior in clinical setting as expected by the medical profession.
- Creating, sustaining and supporting a professional environment.
Promoting Professionalism

- **Institutional Environment (Academic Health Center)**
  - Every interaction within a training program shapes and molds behavior.
  - Residents/students need to see faculty role-models.
  - “Unfriendly” culture can erode teaching goals.
    - Unprofessional behavior can be perpetuated within a system.
Promoting Professionalism

- Challenged by managed care revolution.
  - By seeing large numbers of patients quickly, teaching physicians have less time to instill professional values in students/residents.
  - Bedside clinical skills can deteriorate.

- Challenged by technological progress.
  - Excess reliance on technology can foster poor history taking, superficial exams and produce doctors deficient in basic skills.
Challenge: Abuse of Power

- Interactions with patients and colleagues.
  - Not allowing patients to voice their wishes.
  - Using junior colleagues to enhance your bibliography.
- Demonstrating bias.
- Sexual harassment.
- Breaches of confidentiality.
  - Casual comments about patients in public (elevator, cocktail party).
Challenge: Arrogance

- Offensive display of superiority and self-importance.
- Haughtiness, vanity and disdain.
- Destroys professionalism in 3 ways:
  1. Reduces ability to think for yourself.
  3. Removes the beneficial role of self-doubt.
Challenge: Greed

- Inappropriate aspiration for fame, power or money.
- No room for understanding or compassion.
- Altruism, caring, generosity and integrity are compromised.
Challenge: Misrepresentation

- Lying: conscious failure to tell the truth.
- Fraud: conscious misrepresentation of material fact with the intent to mislead.
  - E.g. - Lying about services performed in order to obtain payments from insurance companies.

- Fraud costs the US an estimated $80 billion per year.
- 826 defendants convicted in FY 2012.

Challenge: Misrepresentation

- What about deception of third-party payers to secure approval of medically-indicated care (i.e. the deception is intended to help the patient)?

169 internists surveyed, deception was supported for:

1. Coronary bypass surgery (57.7%)
2. Arterial revascularization (56.2%)
3. Intravenous pain meds and nutrition (47.5%)
4. Screening mammography (34.8%)
5. Emergency psychiatric referral (32.1%)
6. Cosmetic rhinoplasty (2.5%)

Challenge: Impairment

- Includes: substance abuse, chemical dependency, alcoholism, dementia and psychiatric illness.
  - Impaired physicians frequently cannot recognize their limitations or acknowledge their impairment.

- Natural reluctance to draw attention to a colleague.
  - Rationalizations:
    - "What if I’m wrong?"
    - "Maybe it’s just a bad day."
    - "Someone who knows him better will act."
    - "What will my colleagues think of me?"
    - "I can’t destroy her family."
Challenge: Lack of Conscientiousness

- Failure to fulfill responsibilities.
- Doing the minimum.
  - E.g. – taking the most abbreviated history; not returning family’s phone call; visits the chart rather than patient; blames bureaucracy for every problem.
- Too busy?
  - E.g. – No time and effort commitment for teaching responsibilities; late for rounds; missing meetings with students.
Challenge: Conflicts of Interest

- Over-utilization of services
  - E.g. – inappropriate treatments; repeated office and hospital visits when no longer necessary; prolonging life with inappropriate intensive therapy.

- Under-utilization of services
  - E.g. - reducing care expenditures by limiting patient access to subspecialty consultation and expensive treatment options.
Challenge: Conflicts of Interest

- Self-referral
  - E.g. — ordering from businesses in which the physician has a financial interest.

- Collaboration with industry in academic environment.
  - Sponsorships — conferences, textbooks, materials.
  - Gifts, samples, meals.

- Compromising principles of clinical investigations.
  - Financial interest in the sponsoring company.
Overcoming Professional Challenges

- Recognize professional responsibility to be trustworthy, truthful and to protect the public interest.
- Ensure that all colleagues enjoy respect for their contributions.
- Protect patient information and confidentiality.
- Consistently and consciously reject haughtiness & over-confidence in favor of empathy.
Overcoming Professional Challenges

- Day-to-day responsibilities
  - Timeliness.
  - Attendance to meetings.
  - Visiting patients, not just charts.
  - Returning patient and family phone calls.
  - Accurate, complete and honest H&Ps.
Overcoming Professional Challenges

Potential conflicts of interest include:

- Collaboration with industry and interest groups?
- Accepting gifts, samples, meals and expenses?
- Capitation – financial interest in providing services?
- Deceiving payers to secure appropriate care for patient?
- Sponsored CME activities?
Overcoming Professional Challenges

- Avoid situations where interest of the physician is placed above the patient’s interest.
- Full and specific disclosure of potential financial conflicts of interest is imperative.
  - When economic self-interest appears to replace scientific integrity, we lose public trust.
Overcoming Professional Challenges

- Recognize obligation to protect patients by taking action to have impaired physician addressed and rehabilitated.
  - “Chain of command” – contact Program Director.
  - Resources: CAP, Physicians’ Health Foundation of Louisiana (PHFL).
Summary

- Categories:
  1. Physician Accountability
  2. Humanistic Qualities
  3. Physician Impairment
  4. Professional Ethics

- Recognize obligations to patients and families, society, and colleagues.
Acknowledgements

- Dayton Daberkow, MD
- Rebecca Frey, PhD
- Stacey Holman, MD
- Richard Tejedor, MD
- Murtuza Ali, MD