

Professionalism & Medical Ethics

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Ethical sensitivity, when and how to teach ethics and teaching medical ethics in "four principle approach", (Respect for autonomy, Beneficence, Non-maleficence, Justice) to medical students in a pluralistic society is a challenging task. Teachers of ethics have obligations not just to teach the subject matter but to help to create an academic environment in which well motivated students have reinforcement of their inherent good qualities. Emphasis should be placed on the ethical aspects of daily medical practice and not just on the dramatic dilemmas raised by modern technology (the 'education of the heart').

MCI proposed basic curricular goals in medical ethics, the curriculum should not attempt to try to improve the moral character of future physicians, but to provide those of sound moral characters with the intellectual tools and interactional skills to give that moral character its best behavioural expression. Students face problems of coping with unethical behaviour by their superiors and of being pressured to carry out activities for which they are untrained or which they may believe to be unethical, as well as having to deal with a variety of other problems which for them may be burning issues.

Current article revolves around below mentioned questions.

- What is professionalism?
- How can it be implemented?
- How is it taught?
- How is it assessed?

Professionalism: Definition

It is not easy to define a profession, but it is likely to have all or some of the following characteristics:

- It is a vocation or calling and implies service to others

- It has a distinctive knowledge base which is kept up to date.
- It determines its own standards and sets its own examinations.
- It has a special relationship with those whom it serves – patients.
- It has particular ethical principles.
- Professionalism is a term which embodies numerous qualities of physicians as public servants.

It has been described by The American Board of Internal Medicine as: "Constituting those attitudes and behaviors that serve to maintain patient interest above physician self-interest". Professionalism aspires to altruism, accountability, excellence, duty, honour, integrity, and respect for others.

The concept of professionalism includes the following values as:

- Honesty
- Altruism
- Service
- Commitment
- Communication
- Commitment to excellence
- Accountability
- Life-long learning

The elements of professionalism required of candidates seeking certification and recertification encompasses:

- A commitment to the highest standards of excellence in the practice of medicine and in the generation and dissemination of knowledge.

- A commitment to sustain the interests and welfare of patients (and the community).
- A commitment to be responsive to the health needs of society.

Main Characteristics of Professional Conduct

- **Altruism** is the essence of professionalism. The best interest of the patients, not self-interest, is the rule.
- **Accountability** is required at many levels: individual patients, society and the profession.
- **Excellence** entails a conscientious effort to exceed normal expectations and make a commitment to life-long learning.
- **Duty** is the free acceptance of a commitment to service.
- **Honor and integrity** are the consistent regard for the highest standards of behaviour and refusal to violate one's personal and professional codes.
- **Respect for others**, like patients and their families, other physician and professional colleagues such as nurses, medical students, residents, subspecialty fellows.

"It will become increasingly difficult for professions to sustain the policy that qualification is for life. Most professionals need to make a commitment to lifelong learning" - Professor Eraut.

What is ethics?

Ethics or moral philosophy is the systematic endeavour to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles and theories. Ethics builds and scrutinizes arguments setting forth large-scale theories on how we ought to act, and it seeks to discover valid principles and the relationship between those principles.

Morality and ethics

The terms moral and ethics come from Latin and Greek, respectively (mores and ethos), deriving their meaning from the idea of "custom". There is also

another Greek word *éthos* which denotes a character feature. Aristotle called his ethics a study of character traits, in sense of virtues and vices.

The use of terms :

Some philosophers use these terms interchangeably, many others distinguish between them.

- I use "morality" to refer to certain customs and practices of people.
- I use "ethics" to refer to the whole domain of morality and moral philosophy which refers to theoretical and philosophical reflection on morality.

Medical ethics

- Is based on philosophical ethics
- It isn't any special ethics but rather ethics of special cases.
- Medical ethics does not concern only doctors but also patients and society.
- The central question of medical ethics is the doctor-patient relationship.

The nature of morality

- Moral acts are acts done to benefit others, they are altruistic and are not motivated by self-interest.
- Morality makes reference to right/wrong/ permissible behavior with regard to basic values.

The moral duties of the doctor

- The duty to help, cure
- The duty to promote and protect the patient's health
- The duty to confidentiality
- The duty to protect the patient's life
- The duty to respect the patient's autonomy
- The duty to protect privacy

- The duty to respect the patient's dignity

The moral rights of the patient

- The right to high quality medical service
- The right to autonomous choice
- The right to decide
- The right to be informed
- The right to privacy
- The right to health education
- The right to dignity

The standards used to determine the incompetence

- Inability to express or communicate a preference or choice.
- Inability to understand one's situation and its consequences.
- Inability to understand relevant information.
- Inability to give a (rational) reason.
- Inability to give risk/benefit related reasons.
- Inability to reach a reasonable decision.

Ethical Scenario

Is it ethically permissible to accept gifts from pharmaceutical representatives?

Gifts to Physicians from Industry.

- Any gift accepted by a physician should primarily entail a benefit to patients and should not be of substantial value.
- Individual gifts of minimal value are permissible as long as they relate to the physician's work.

How can it be implemented?

Role of the doctor within the health service

- Understanding of the health care system
- Understanding of clinical responsibilities
- Appreciation of doctor as researcher
- Appreciation of doctor as mentor or teacher
- Appreciation of doctor as manager including quality control

- Team work

Personal Development

- **Selflearner**
- **Self awareness:** enquires into own competence, Emotional awareness and Self confidence
- **Selfregulation**
 - Self care
 - Self control
 - Personal time management
- **Motivation**
 - Achievement drive
 - Commitment
 - Initiative
- **Career choice**

How Students Learn Professional values

1. Bring some to medical school with them
2. Learn some through the formal curriculum
3. Learn some from role models

How can it be taught?

It can be taught by formal- (Explicit) Curriculum and informal- (Hidden) Curriculum. The other modes are as below.

- Role modeling
- Role Plays
- Simulated Patients
- Small group discussions

How can it be assessed?

It can be assessed by

- Simulated patients
- Direct observation (rating scale, log books, Critical events)
- Portfolios
- OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) / OSPE (Objective Structured Practical Examination)

Summary

- Professionalism should be part of the formal curriculum.
- Professionalism must be taught and evaluated.
- Professionalism must be relevant to the society.

