

General Standards of Professionalism*

The general public holds physicians to a high standard and expects them to monitor the professional behavior of their colleagues. As future physicians, medical students at the Marshall University School of Medicine have a responsibility to follow this model and guide their actions to serve in the best interest of their fellow students, patients, and faculty by maintaining the highest degree of personal and professional integrity. Students need to remain cognizant of the fact that they are representative of the medical profession in and out of the academic health environment. Therefore, allegations of misconduct by any medical student will be taken very seriously.

Definitions and Components of Professionalism Standards

Students represent the Marshall University School of Medicine and are expected to uphold the standards of physicianhood. High standards of behavior promote a spirit of community conducive to mutual trust among the students, patients, medical team and society. Medical students are expected to attempt to do that which is right in all of their dealings with fellow students, faculty, other health care professions, and patients. They are expected to promote the highest possible standard of behavior and moral conduct by adhering to the following Components of Professional Standards that are based upon, but not limited to, the American Board of Internal Medicine's Project on Professionalism:

- A. Altruism:** Students should put the interest of patients and the health care team above self-interest and respect the privacy and the dignity of the patient. Altruism considers both the physical and the psychological well-being of the patient and implies compassionate care of the patient.
- B. Accountability:** Students are to be accountable to patients, other health care providers, the medical team, their fellow students, the society and the profession. The implied contract of the patient /physician relationship must be fulfilled. Accountability also implies reliability. Students are expected to attend all course activities, be prompt in their arrival, and complete all assignments, duties and tasks in a timely manner.
- C. Excellence:** Students are to strive to exceed ordinary expectations and to commit to lifelong learning.
- D. Duty:** Students are to accept commitment to service even at the cost of personal convenience.

- E. **Honor and Integrity:** Students are required to maintain high personal standards and are expected to refuse to violate their personal or professional codes.
- F. **Respect:** Students are to have a respect for others including colleagues, patients, their families, other health care providers and staff.

Challenges to Academic Integrity and Elements of Professionalism

Based upon standards of professional behavior adapted from the American Board of Internal Medicine's Project on Professionalism and the Marshall University School of Medicine learning objectives, challenges to the elements of academic integrity and professionalism are described below.

- A. **Abuse of Power:** Students must be considerate of patient autonomy while interacting with patients and colleagues. Students must allow patients to voice their own opinions. Students are to refrain from allowing academic competitiveness to interfere with one's own academic career or the career of others. Students must also be able to recognize their own knowledge limitations and therefore set proper limits upon patient/physician relationship and activities. Other components of Abuse of Power may include: 1) Bias and Sexual Harassment in which students must treat all their colleagues and patients with respect regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic class or sexual orientation and, 2) Breach of Confidentiality in which students must be cognizant of patient confidentiality at all times, even in non-medical related environments and refrain from discussion of patients in public places. An example of abuse of power would be a student who prematurely discusses a diagnosis and possible treatment plans with a patient before discussion with the health care team or attending physician.
- B. **Arrogance:** Students must refrain from the offensive display of superiority and self-importance. Professionalism is destroyed by superiority and self-importance in three ways: 1) It reduces the student's ability to think for themselves; 2) It reduces the capacity for empathy and, 3) It removes the important characteristic of self-doubt. Students must accept constructive feedback, including formative and summative evaluation, and use it to improve performance. An example of arrogance would be if a student were constantly and inappropriately challenging to the attending on rounds.
- C. **Greed:** Students must curtail the inappropriate aspiration for fame, power or money. A student's drive for higher grades rather than for learning or for the overall good of the health care team can be included in this category.

Greed can compromise altruism, caring, generosity and integrity. A greed example would be if a student skips rounds to prepare for his/her presentation.

- D. Misrepresentation:** Students must abstain from any lying, cheating or fraud. Lying requires a conscious effort to misstate the truth. Fraud is a conscious misrepresentation of a material fact with the intent to mislead. Examples of this would include but not be limited to, presenting case findings without actually seeing the patient first or submitting a mentor's reflection without seeing the patient or performing the experience.
- E. Impairment:** Students who feel they are impaired in their ability to care for patients should contact their clerkship director, the Academic or Student Affairs Offices or the "Health Line." When students do not recognize impairment, the school has the right and responsibility to seek professional evaluation of them. An example of impairment would be if a student were unable to care for patients due to drug addiction, alcohol dependency or mental impairment.
- F. Lack of Conscientiousness:** Students must fulfill their responsibilities toward patient care as well as the academic requirements of the clerkship. Failure to do so is a lack of conscientiousness. The expectation of the physician is excellence not mediocrity. A student who is doing the bare minimum, arriving late for rounds or missing conferences or other scheduled activities would be an example of lack of conscientiousness.
- G. Conflicts of Interest:** Students must avoid situations in which the interest of the student is placed above the interest of the patient, the medical team or colleagues. A conflict of interest example would be if a student attended a pharmaceutical dinner to get a free book instead of rounding and/or caring of patients.

* This document was taken from our current **Standards of Academic Honesty and Professionalism Policy** (<http://musom.marshall.edu/students/policies/>). Students should review this policy for more specific information.