

# Professionalism in the Online Medical Learning Environment



WAYNE STATE  
School of Medicine

Matthew Bautista<sup>1</sup>, Paige Hammis<sup>1</sup>, Nathan Sim<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Wayne State University School of Medicine

## INTRODUCTION

- Professionalism is a pillar of medicine that is necessary in developing trust between a patient and physician.
- Despite its importance, professionalism is not always easily defined and is often difficult to assess in medical education.
- The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth an urgent need to shift medical education to an online platform across the country.
- This change warranted extensive discussion on how the implementation of professionalism in virtual learning would be achieved.

## METHODS

- Wayne State University medical students reviewed the literature to examine different perspectives in defining professionalism in medical education.
- We sought to identify the perspectives of students, faculty, and governing bodies of professionalism to develop a holistic picture of what professionalism means on an individual and organizational scale.
- We used this information to reflect on the significance of professionalism and how, most importantly, it may impact clinical practice and patient care by physicians.
- Lastly, we discuss potential shifts in the dynamic of professionalism in the future of medical education.

## RESULTS

- The Physician Charter was outlined by the ABIM Foundation, an organization dedicated to fostering professionalism at all levels of the health care field.
- The ABIM Foundation defines professionalism as "the basis of medicine's contract with society".
- Three fundamental principles stand as the pillars of professionalism:

### **Patient Welfare**

Altruism in the form of serving the best interests of the patient

### **Patient Autonomy**

Maintaining honesty with patients and empowering them to make informed decisions

### **Social Justice**

Acting to ensure fair distribution of services and to eliminate discrimination

### **Student Perspectives**

- In a survey, first-year medical students stated that their professional identity revolved around the principles of ethics, reputation, dependability, and integrity.
- Similarly, second-year medical students stated that the principles of responsibility, ethics, innovation, and self-improvement were important to their professional identity.

### **Faculty Perspectives**

- Medical school faculty stated that professionalism is traditionally difficult to assess, as it is a dynamic and evolving process.
- One aspect of education that facilitates this is gross anatomy, where accountability, teamwork, respect for the patient, and social responsibility are principles that students develop through working with each other.

## CONCLUSION

- Professionalism is an integral component of medical education. Students who appeared before their school disciplinary board were more likely to face disciplinary action in residency.
- The COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated the transition of pre-clerkship learning to the online learning environment.
- While medical education is always evolving, professionalism remains necessary in the development of clinically and ethically competent physicians.
- It is important to continue educating students in both pre-clinical and clinical years as professional development in education translates to professionalism in the practice of patient care in the future.

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